

STALIN'S ARCHITECT



**POWER AND
SURVIVAL
IN MOSCOW**
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Boris Iofan, in his studio in Moscow, with a study for a representation of Lenin, planned for the top of the Palace of the Soviets, the project that he spent twenty-five years of his life trying to build.



One of Iofan's designs for the Palace of the Soviets.

Stalin's Architect
Power and Survival
in Moscow
Boris Iofan (1891–1976)

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About the Author

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Introduction

‘Poetry might survive in a totalitarian age, and certain arts or half-arts, such as architecture, might even find tyranny beneficial, but the prose writer would have no choice between silence or death.’

*George Orwell*¹



Stalin, with a model of the Moscow–Volga canal, portrayed as the great architect of socialism by Aleksandr Bubnov in 1940. Iofan's Soviet pavilion for the Paris Exposition, in the background, had been demolished three years earlier.

For Boris Iofan, the most prominent of Stalin's architects, the patronage of a murderous dictator came at serious personal risk – as much to his critical reputation as to his life. Rather than not build at all, he was

prepared to build what the dictator demanded of him. As a result, Iofan is now remembered not for his considerable talent, but for the way that his buildings came to define Stalinist architecture as it was practised from Warsaw to Beijing.

Ever since the summer of 2008, when I visited his former apartment on the top floor of Moscow's famous House on the Embankment, I have been unable to get Boris Iofan out of my mind. The House – which is in fact a large complex with more than 500 flats and its own cinema, theatre and department store – was one of his most significant projects.

Iofan's apartment had hardly been touched since his death thirty years earlier. From its windows I could see the golden domes of the new Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, a replica of the historic church destroyed by Stalin in 1931 to make room for the Palace of the Soviets. Iofan had watched the demolition of the original cathedral from this same window. In these rooms, surrounded by friends and colleagues – many of whom would soon be murdered by Stalin – he had celebrated his victory in the competition to design the palace, which he intended to be the world's tallest building. Later, he watched a perfect circle of giant cranes rise on its construction site like a hollow crown, in a futile struggle to drag his reluctant building up from the mud. When the German army threatened Moscow in 1941, the crown imploded and the site went quiet; it remained so for a decade after the war. All Iofan's hopes for the project were finally drowned when Nikita Khrushchev had the palace foundation pit flooded to create a huge open-air swimming pool. Iofan did not live to see the reappearance of the cathedral.

Except perhaps for Minoru Yamasaki and his World Trade Center in Manhattan, no architect of the 20th century has designed a structure that has become more politically charged with meaning, or that has come to play such an important part in a country's history and culture. But while the Twin Towers were immolated, Iofan's House on the Embankment survived, even as so many of its residents fell victim to Stalin's violence.

The apartment had the smell of years of neglect. A plastic shower curtain had been slung over boxes of Iofan's papers, but it did little to protect them from the dust generated by workmen attempting to modernize the kitchen. Under his desk was a plaster maquette of the Lenin statue he had designed to stand atop the Palace of the Soviets. On a table was another of a worker, right arm raised over his head in a conscious paraphrase of the Statue of Liberty: this had formed the basis for a huge stainless steel figure that topped the Soviet pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, an incongruous tribute to the proletarian revolution in Queens.



Iofan in his study in Moscow in the early 1950s. An excitable American journalist from *Time* magazine called Iofan ‘one of USSR’s best-loved architects. Dark-eyed, black-haired, his energetic, agile figure is recognized everywhere in Moscow. Married and childless, he lives in a modern four-room apartment for which he pays sixty roubles a month (telephone, radio, gas and light included). He keeps one maid.’²

I found sheaves of black-edged official envelopes in a box. Among them was a telegram marked ‘SECRET’ from Vyacheslav Molotov, dispatching Iofan to Stalingrad in a military transport plane immediately after the surrender of the German forces to advise on the reconstruction of a city that had been all but destroyed. Nearby were stacks of photograph albums; in one, an image of Iofan and his aristocratic half-Italian wife Olga, daughter of a Russian princess, taking tea with Frank Lloyd Wright at a conference in Moscow. In this picture Iofan appears a sympathetic, sensitive-featured man in his mid-forties, hair combed back from a high forehead. His wife, with a cigarette in her hand and a briefcase under her arm, looks animated, an equal partner in the conversation with the notoriously egotistical Wright.

After this visit, I began trying to learn as much as I could about what had gone on in Iofan’s mind as he saw his work turned into a monstrous tribute to Stalin – as much as it is ever possible to know about the internal lives of others. I tried to piece together all the disparate elements, the surviving objects and records, in a way that made sense. Mostly I was driven by a desire to understand the part that architecture had played in the state apparatus of one of history’s most murderous regimes. But I was also drawn in by Iofan himself and the remarkable life that this stylishly dressed, distinguished figure – who looked disarmingly like my own father – had lived. I had spent six years studying architecture myself; what would I have done in Iofan’s place?

In the course of Iofan’s forty-five years in this apartment, his bookshelves had filled up with volumes devoted to his own work as well as to that of the Renaissance masters he admired. His drawings of interiors for the Palace of the Soviets had been peeled away from his drawing board, to be framed and hung on the walls: no longer working documents, but fading memorials to what might have been. The chaotic mess of books, papers, fraternal greetings, medals and ancient electrical appliances felt like the residue of an entire system – which is exactly what it was.

Outside, on that June day, Moscow was booming. A cascade of oil money was floating an armada of Prada stores where the more discreet customers left their bodyguards, dressed in camouflage uniforms,

waiting on the pavement while they shopped. There were sushi restaurants with cellars full of Petrus, streets lined with Hummers with blacked-out windows. But the House on the Embankment smelled of sour decay. It was no longer the heart of the city.

As if in mockery of the red stars Stalin had impaled on the Kremlin spires across the river, the building was topped by a huge, revolving three-pointed Mercedes star – a relic of the wild excesses of the immediate post-communist period. That emblem has gone now, its removal ordered by Moscow's mayor in 2011.

Things were very different in 1937, when Thomas Sgovio, a young and idealistic Italian American communist from upstate New York living in Moscow, visited Iofan in his apartment: number 426 on the sought-after top floor, facing the river. In those days many people in Moscow lived in miserably overcrowded conditions, sometimes went hungry, and were dressed mostly in worn-out clothing and shoes patched together with scraps of sacking. Inside the House on the Embankment was a cocoon of what would have seemed to them like unimaginable luxury.

Sgovio was hoping for Iofan's help in securing a place at one of Moscow's art schools. They had been introduced by a mutual acquaintance who knew Iofan from his own time as a student in Rome. Sgovio was baffled by the process of finding his way to the Iofans' apartment in such an enormous building with so many entrances. He had to produce a special permit, leave his passport at the guard post and follow an official escort to the lift. From there, an attendant took him up to the eleventh floor. A maid let him into the apartment and he was welcomed by Olga, a stately-looking woman who spoke in perfect English and offered him tea. Then Iofan himself appeared, the streaks of white in his dark hair adding a distinguished touch to his appearance.

Sgovio had been horrified by his experiences of everyday life in Moscow. When he ate in a workers' canteen, the scraps of food he left on his plate were grabbed from him by hungry neighbours. It was not what he had expected from the world's first socialist country. The Iofans' home felt like an entirely different world, and he was charmed by their kindness. He also remembered noticing that Iofan's clothes 'were foreign-made – grey tweed slacks, black sleeveless sweater, white shirt, brown Oxfords with thick sponge soles – which gave him a youthful appearance'.³

After tea, Iofan invited Sgovio into the studio and settled down to examine his portfolio of drawings. He looked at them carefully and commented politely, handing them to Olga for her to see the work for herself. Standing in the centre of the room, which had skylights and a view of the river, was a model of the Palace of the Soviets. Was this the actual model chosen by Stalin, Sgovio asked? Iofan laughed. 'No, that one is even larger. This is my personal working model.'⁴

They talked about New York, a city Iofan had recently visited. He told Sgovio that he did not think much of modern American architecture: 'It represents an ugly expression of capitalism. The skyscrapers are tall, rectangular boxes, made of shiny steel and stone, made to hide the ghettos of the poor beneath them. This is the architecture of the rich, eh? There is no spaciousness, no room to breathe.'⁵

As Iofan showed him the model of the palace, Sgovio recalls him saying: 'You see what I mean about spaciousness. The Palace of the Soviets will be the tallest building in the world. The radius of the base is more than its height. Can you imagine the capitalists building something like this in New York? The land on which it would stand costs millions, perhaps billions. It would take centuries for them to capitalize on the cost of the land alone. Here the land belongs to the people, and the Palace of the Soviets will belong to the people.'⁶

Sgovio never did go to art school; he was arrested by the secret police at the gates of the American Embassy shortly after his meeting with Iofan. Convicted of being 'a socially dangerous element', he was sentenced to sixteen years of forced labour.⁷ He survived a series of prison camps by using his artistic skills to draw tattoos for the criminals who were incarcerated alongside him. Many years later, back in America, he wrote an account of his disillusionment with communism – Iofan never had the chance to read it, but it might have prompted him to see some parallels with his own life story. Both men had joined the Communist Party out of conviction; both had chosen to move with their families to the Soviet Union; and both had used their talents as a means of staying alive.

Boris Mikhailovich Iofan died in 1976, the same year that *The House on the Embankment*, a bestselling novella by the Moscow writer Yuri Trifonov, was published. Iofan was eighty-four – a long life by any standards, but particularly impressive for the Soviet Union – and being cared for at Barvikha, a sanatorium that he had built for the Communist Party elite nearly fifty years earlier.

The House on the Embankment is a lightly fictionalized account of the experiences of people living in Iofan's austere complex of apartment blocks, located just across the river from the Kremlin. At the time he designed it, in the late 1920s – when the revolution was still a recent memory and an inspiration to many communists – it was known as Government House, and it would be home to most of the Soviet elite during the 1930s. Trifonov's novella made such an impact that its title immediately became the building's popular name, and today the House on the Embankment remains one of Moscow's most prominent landmarks.

Iofan, his wife, two stepchildren and his younger sister Anna were among the first to take up residence in the House, moving in at the start of 1931. With the exception of two years when he was evacuated during the Great Patriotic War, he would live there for the rest of his life, sharing it with his stepdaughter after the deaths of his wife and his brother Dmitry in 1961.

Yuri Trifonov also lived in the House on the Embankment during the 1930s. He was present on the night that his father, who had been a hero of the Bolshevik revolution, was marched away to his death. Shortly afterwards, his mother was sent to a labour camp. Trifonov was just twelve years old at the time; she did not return until he was twenty. Like many other victims of Stalin, the Trifonovs' truncated lives are commemorated today in the line of wall plaques mounted near the entrances to the House. As many as 800 of their fellow residents – one-third of the people living there in 1932 – were eventually arrested by Stalin's secret policemen, and more than 300 of them were shot.

The House on the Embankment captures the paranoiac mixture of privilege and fear felt by all those, including the Iofans, who lived in this 'huge grey apartment house with its 1,000 windows giving it the look of a whole town'.⁸ Trifonov depicts a building patrolled by white-gloved militiamen, with all-seeing lift operators employed by the Ministry of the Interior guarding access to its apartments, on corridors that smelled of cooking. He portrays the anxiety of lives spent in the unspoken knowledge of secret listening rooms where policemen laboured day and night, transcribing conversations relayed by microphones embedded in walls and listening in on telephone calls. Even as late as the 1970s, these things could not be discussed openly.

The novella examines the awkward relationship between the residents of the House, living in claustrophobic luxury, and those in its shadow who lacked everything. It illuminates the moral squalor of the endless compromises Stalin demanded of the Soviet elite, from admirals to philosophers to schoolchildren, politicians and architects. It exposes the jockeying for position and the emptiness of a society in which the ideology of the state is a weapon to be deployed in settling personal scores. It explores the political uses of privilege in a supposedly classless society.

The House on the Embankment first appeared in an issue of the literary monthly *Druzhba narodov* (*Peoples' Friendship*), and later as a book. Many critics were amazed that it had been published at all, especially in a magazine with a reputation for taking, at least in Soviet terms, a culturally conservative position. There were some savage reviews by various orthodox defenders of the regime who would have preferred to see it sink without trace, but in spite of their efforts it was a huge success. Its acknowledgment of the psychological damage caused by decades of dishonest public rhetoric was like a gulp of life-saving oxygen in the stifling airlessness of Brezhnev's Soviet Union.

It is impossible to know whether Boris Iofan read Trifonov's book before he died. But he might well have encountered Trifonov as a child decades earlier, playing around the fountain in one of the building's three courtyards. Contemporary accounts suggest that Iofan was an approachable and genial figure, ready to entertain the children of the building in his home. He and Olga had the luxury of an apartment spacious enough to accommodate Boris's personal studio (his official studio was beside the Kremlin walls) and a live-in housekeeper. Before the war he kept his Buick convertible, purchased during a trip to the USA in 1934, in the garage beneath the building.

Elina Kisis, daughter of the party official I. R. Kisis, later recalled visiting Iofan as a ten-year-old. 'During the day Boris Mikhailovich liked to work in his studio and I would often go and visit him there. He grew fond of me and used to show me beautiful pictures, books, and postcards, give me apples and pat me on the head. There for the first time I saw many things that we and others did not have. There were some dark, shiny figures and figurines (probably bronze, but also a few white marble ones) on tall stands. There were lots of paintings and other mysterious things. In the middle of the studio, on tripods, were some huge drawing boards with pictures of a tall building that looked like a Kremlin tower, with a man on top. "That's Lenin," he said.'⁹

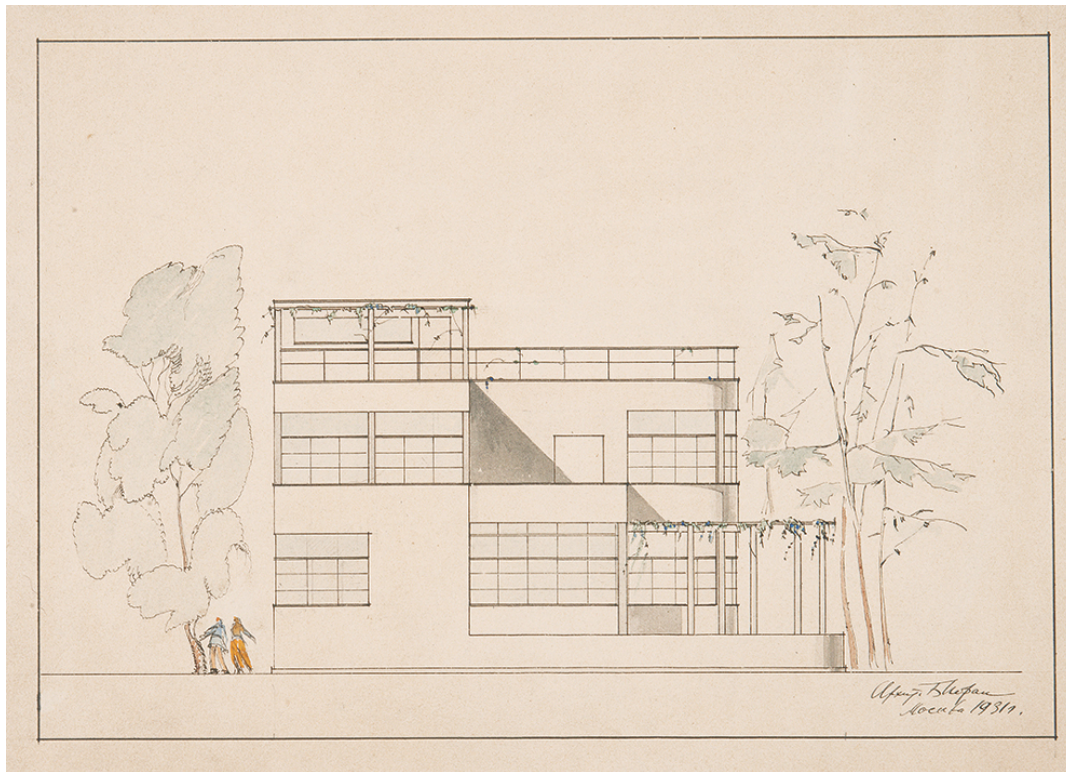
In Trifonov's book there is a character whose home has space to host fifty guests for a party and 'corridors that feel like museum galleries'.¹⁰ Elsewhere, he describes priceless 19th-century Russian seascapes lining the walls of one apartment and plaster busts of great but politically suspect philosophers, 'probably acquired in Berlin', on the library shelves of another.¹¹ He mentions the progressive-looking lampshades and the modernist government-issued furniture (designed by Iofan) in one of the more modest three-room apartments. Many other residents had the means to buy and install their own custom-made furniture, imported in at least one case from England.

Iofan would have clearly understood the dilemma that faced anyone for whom meeting the demands of Stalin and his enablers was the price of remaining in these apartments – even of staying alive. As a child, Trifonov's protagonist, Vadim Aleksandrovich Glebov, in a fit of schoolboy hooligan envy persuades two of his friends to assault the son of a high-ranking NKVD officer living in the House on the Embankment. Later, Glebov reveals their names to the official, believing that he has no choice if he is to secure the officer's help in arranging the release of a relative of his who has been arrested. His friends are never seen again – but Glebov's relative stays in the gulag. As a graduate student after the war, Glebov is encouraged by the party cell at his university to inform on a professor suspected of so-called 'cosmopolitanism'. The professor is not only a resident of the House on the Embankment, but is about to become Glebov's father-in-law. What can Glebov do but comply, if he is to secure academic tenure after completing his doctorate? With no apparent difficulty he betrays his fiancée and her father, his teacher, for the sake of a safer and more comfortable life.



The House on the Embankment, across the Moskva River from the Kremlin, was the most substantial achievement of Iofan's career. It was a city within the city, built to house the Soviet elite, including the architect himself. During Stalin's purges 300 of its residents were executed.

Iofan was himself accused of cosmopolitanism in 1949, and it cost him the chance to build Moscow State University; but ten years earlier, he had an even more difficult challenge to deal with. He had to close his eyes while Stalin set his torturers to work on Aleksei Rykov, former premier of the Soviet Union and one of Iofan's closest friends. It was Rykov, in fact, who had given Iofan the task of building the House on the Embankment, and the two had been neighbours there before his arrest.



Before Iofan's first patron Aleksei Rykov was purged from the Soviet leadership, Iofan designed a dacha for him. His study for a villa dates from that period, reflecting the same purist geometry that he used for the Barvikha sanatorium, and looks close to the mainstream of European modernism.

It was not enough for Iofan simply to keep silent. The price he had to pay for designing the Palace of the Soviets – the most important building of his career, on which he began working even before the House on the Embankment was finished – was to keep up a continual stream of praise for the genius of Stalin. Even after Rykov's judicial murder, Iofan declared: 'Never before has an artist been able to devote himself in this way to an art that is placed at the service of the workers, at the service of a new and remarkable culture, the culture of a communist society – as now, in the era of the great Stalin.'¹²

In his well-cut tweed suits and knitted ties, with his sensitive, watchful eyes, Iofan appeared to be the model of a liberal modern architect. However, he seems to have willingly declared his devotion to 'the leader of peoples, the inspirer of all our victories, Comrade Stalin, who helped us to arrive at the final form of the Palace of Soviets. We live in the great era of joyous creative labour.'¹³ Iofan wrote his own speeches, so it seems reasonable to conclude that he was prepared to say whatever he needed to in order to stay alive. To this day, his surviving family members believe that despite everything, he always respected Stalin.

Iofan was not vindictive in the way of some of his contemporaries, such as Karo Alabyan, architect of the Red Army Theatre in Moscow with its notorious floor plan in the form of a five-pointed Soviet star. Alabyan's campaign against those he claimed were Trotskyite architects and Gestapo agents led directly to the death of Mikhail Okhitovich, a visionary urban theorist who was arrested and executed as a result of his denunciation. Alabyan was equally eager to destroy the career of the prodigiously gifted Ivan Leonidov; and there almost certainly were other victims.

But although Iofan did not betray his friend Rykov – and indeed seems to have made an effort to help Rykov's daughter when she was subsequently imprisoned in a labour camp – he remained loyal to the regime that had killed him. He said just enough in public to do his duty, to help impose Stalin's will on his architectural colleagues and ensure his own reputation for reliable loyalty. In 1929, when the strikingly original winning design in a competition to build the Lenin Library was abruptly abandoned in favour of a piece of socialist realist architecture, it was Iofan the party deployed to endorse the

decision at a public debate. He was prepared to put his talent at the service of the ‘leadership of the militant vanguard of the Soviet people’s struggle’.¹⁴

Another of Iofan’s close friends was the charismatic theatre director and actor Solomon Mikhoels, a kind of Soviet counterpart to Laurence Olivier. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the two men were founder members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee; Mikhoels became the committee chairman, touring the world to raise money and support for the USSR. After the war, when Mikhoels had outlived his usefulness, Stalin had him secretly murdered as a first step towards dismantling the committee. Before the majority of the committee’s members were arrested, Iofan was proposed by the NKVD (the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) as a more reliable replacement to take over the leadership. And in the course of his career he also worked closely with the three most fearsome leaders of the Soviet secret police: first Feliks Dzerzhinsky, then Genrikh Yagoda and finally Lavrenty Beria.

While none of the characters in *The House on the Embankment* is based directly on Iofan, the book vividly describes the milieu in which he and his family lived. It depicts the building in its pomp during the 1930s, when its residents enjoyed luxuries hard to find in Moscow. Iofan designed a hair salon for their exclusive use; a department store, stocked with imported items unobtainable elsewhere in Russia; a laundry; a billiard hall. There were home film shows, and there was a remarkable abundance of food. Even in the midst of the catastrophic man-made famine in Ukraine, which touched the whole country, the comfortable matrons of the House on the Embankment could afford to dismiss day-old cake as ‘stale’.¹⁵

In 1941, Iofan led a team of architects and artists whose task was to camouflage sites such as the Kremlin, Red Square and the Bolshoi Theatre in order to screen them from German bombing raids. But, as Trifonov writes, ‘there was no way to disguise the river; its shining surface reflected the stars, its bends marked out the districts of the city’.¹⁶ Trifonov wrote about ‘cold, clear, starlit nights’ when ‘anti-aircraft guns flashed incessantly all around and deafened us with their noise. I shall never forget that smell of powder smoke above the roofs of Moscow, the clatter of shell splinters falling on sheet iron and the sad smell of burning coming from somewhere beyond Serpukhovskaya Street.’¹⁷ The House on the Embankment ‘was surrounded by near misses’.¹⁸ Iofan and his family experienced for themselves the chaos of being evacuated, as portrayed in the book: ‘The evacuation trains left at dawn, but they had to go to the station hours beforehand because the business of getting on the train was so chaotic.’¹⁹ Iofan was one of the few who not only survived Stalin’s purges, but subsequently returned to Moscow – although, as Trifonov describes it, the House on the Embankment was never quite the same after the war.



Iofan's undated pen-and-ink sketch, a study for the House on the Embankment (also known as Government House, as in the inscription), reflects his use of underlying classical symmetry.

Through a mixture of luck, judgment and calculation, Iofan stayed alive while many of his friends and colleagues did not. Trifonov too was able to negotiate his own accommodation with the regime, although he was one of only seven out of more than 7,000 Writers' Union members to protest at the expulsion of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Georgi Markov, secretary of the union, rebuked him: 'No matter how great a talent a writer may possess, it can be expressed with full clarity only in an atmosphere of struggle for implementing the great social transformation that is waged by the Soviet people led by its militant vanguard, the Communist Party.'²⁰

Yet Trifonov managed to get his book published uncensored in the Soviet Union – far from a given in the repressive Brezhnev era. He used his good fortune to present a nuanced but unflinching exploration of the choices that are open to individuals faced with dangerous moral dilemmas. His courage and the quality of his writing would have made him a strong contender for the 1981 Nobel Prize. *The House on the Embankment* is impressive both as a work of literature and as a reflection of its author's integrity.

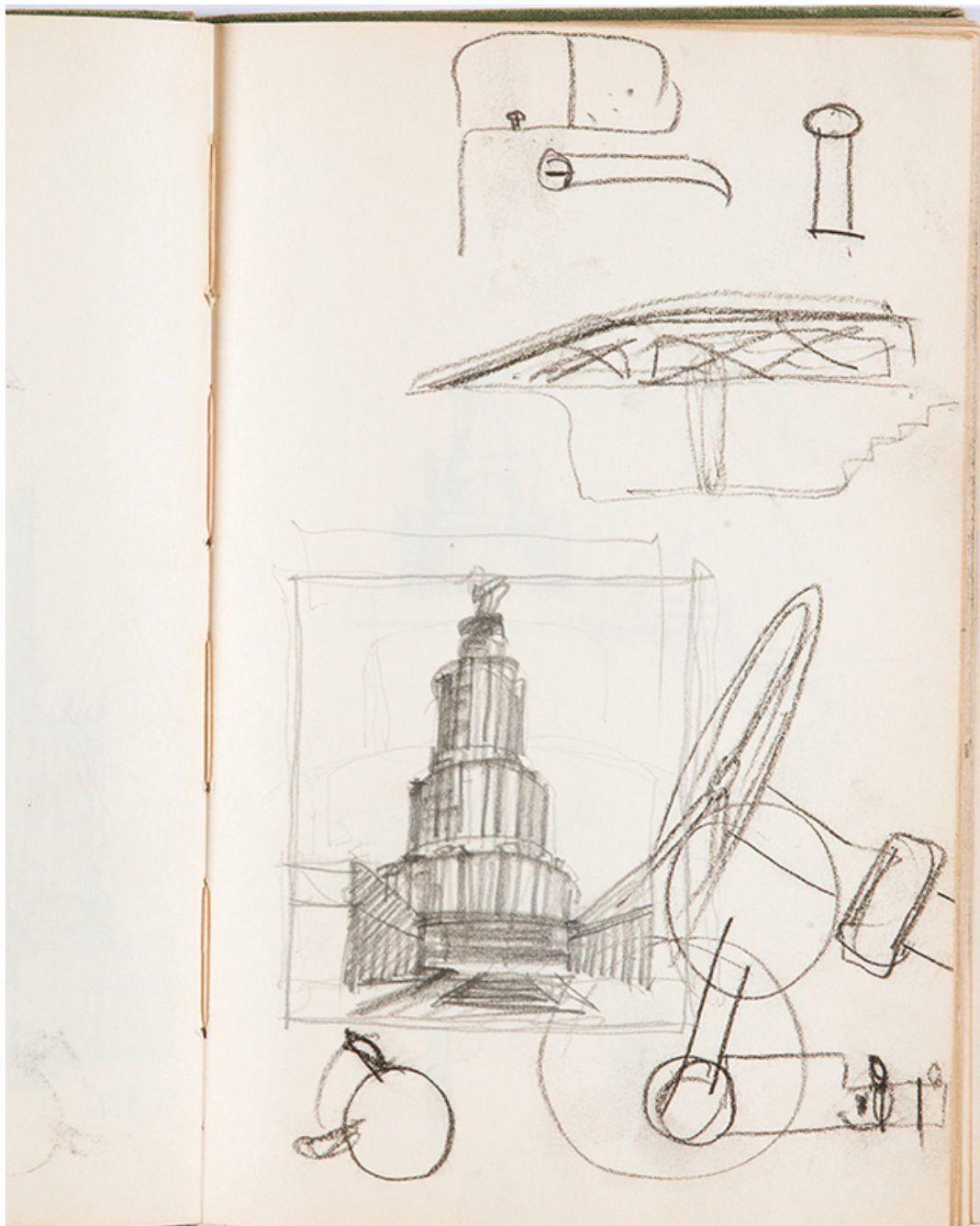
When Iofan intervened on the side of conservatism in the argument over the Lenin Library, his bolder colleagues were able to point to the modernism of his own design for the Barvikha sanatorium to suggest, at the very least, a certain inconsistency. Classicism had been a lifelong inspiration to him, but he was clearly also ready to work in other architectural languages. What, then, did Iofan really believe? To what extent were his stated architectural opinions based on conviction rather than expediency? There are some clues. Isaak Eigel, a former office manager in Iofan's studio, published a monograph on his employer and friend in 1978, although his personal recollections may not all be strictly accurate – and

he was writing at a time when it was not possible to be entirely frank. Iofan himself wrote a number of articles for the Soviet press, both professional and general. In addition, Moscow's Shchusev Museum of Architecture holds many of his drawings and some of his correspondence, and there are more drawings in Berlin at the Tchoban Foundation.



The Barvikha sanatorium designed by Iofan and in which he died in 1976. Its purist geometry gave the constructivists ammunition to blame Iofan for inconsistency when he gave public support for the monumental Lenin Library.

I was fortunate enough to be able to view some of Iofan's hardback sketchbooks in the Alex Lachmann collection, with soft, yellowing cartridge paper and sewn bindings. He bought them in Paris and New York, along with the wire-bound ruled exercise books in which he drafted his speeches. The drawings especially seemed to offer a way into his mind: for an architect, it is much harder to conceal feelings in a drawing than in a safely typed sentence. These drawings trace Iofan's development all the way from his ten years of studying and working in Rome to the building of the light-filled sanatorium in Moscow's greenest suburb, Barvikha, and then on to the Palace of the Soviets and his other unbuilt projects.



In his sketchbooks Iofan explored ideas that interested him, alongside his architectural designs. Here, his drawings for an early version of the Palace of the Soviets blurred into an examination of the mechanical parts of his motor car.

The Barvikha project appears as humane and progressive as anything that Alvar Aalto – born seven years after Iofan and, like him, once a subject of the Russian empire – was creating at the same time in Finland. Patients at Barvikha even had rooms to themselves, whereas in the tuberculosis sanatorium Aalto designed at Paimio there were two beds in every room. However, Paimio was open to all Finnish citizens, while Barvikha was reserved for the hierarchy of the Communist Party leadership.

Barvikha and the House on the Embankment are clearly part of mainstream European modernism, whereas Iofan had previously designed modestly scaled, ingeniously planned apartment buildings in a kind of Mediterranean vernacular. After his first trip to New York in 1934 – despite the harsh judgments on American architecture that he later shared with Sgovio – he returned fascinated by Rockefeller Center, and its influence is visible in his design for the Soviet pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition. But

none of these things would in any way predict the scale and form of the Palace of the Soviets, Iofan's materialization of Stalin's monstrous id. As Frank Lloyd Wright wrote of it: 'The Work Palace, to be the crowning glory of the new [Moscow] construction, suffers likewise from grandomania of the American type in imitating skyscraper effects way up to the soles of the enormous shoes of Lenin, where the realistic figure of that human giant begins to be 300 feet tall. Something peculiar to the present cultural state of the Soviet is to be seen in the sharp contrast between thick shoes and workman's clothes and skyscraper elegances....Lenin, enormous, treads upon the whole, regardless. Nothing more incongruous could be conceived and I believe nothing more distasteful to the great man Lenin.'²¹

Iofan made his mark at three particularly significant moments in the political history of 20th-century architecture – in Moscow, Paris and New York. Conventional accounts concentrate on the other participants in these cultural and political dramas: Le Corbusier, typically presented as the dominant figure in the 1931 competition to build the Palace of the Soviets; then, four years later, Picasso, whose *Guernica* was painted for the Spanish pavilion at the Paris Exposition; and lastly, at the 1939 New York World's Fair, Wallace Harrison with his Trylon and Perisphere and Norman Bel Geddes with his crowd-pleasing Futurama exhibit. But it was Iofan whom Joseph Stalin chose to design the Palace of the Soviets, rather than Le Corbusier, and the evidence shows that Iofan carried out his instructions faithfully. It was Iofan's Soviet pavilion that confronted its German counterpart at the Paris Exposition, and it was Iofan who gave the Soviet Union the most popular foreign pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

Iofan's story is partly about his remarkable ability to survive the worst of times when many of his contemporaries did not, but it also illustrates the price of working for the monstrous Stalin. This book is an attempt to trace the intersections between the personal and the political. Iofan's career is a precise reflection of all the compromises that architects must make with power. We should be thankful that for the past half century, most creative individuals have not had to face such a brutally sharp choice. But with a disturbing increase in the number of leaders we can only describe as authoritarian – trying on the second-hand trappings of totalitarianism for size – now is the time to explore how previous generations such as Iofan's addressed, or failed to address, these life-or-death decisions.

Odessa and St Petersburg

Like many of his fellow 20th-century architects, including Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright, Boris Mikhailovich Iofan began his career by redesigning his own name. He was born Borukh Solomonovich Iofan on 28 April 1891 in the Black Sea port city of Odessa, to Solomon and Golda Iofan.



Odessa's art school, where both Iofan and his brother Dmitry studied, taught many of the Soviet Union's most creative painters and sculptors.

Russian Jews at this time were obliged to adopt national naming conventions, assuming a surname (not generally part of Jewish tradition) as well as a patronymic. A name change in tsarist Russia was no small matter, subject to close imperial regulation: from 1850 until the revolution, even baptised Jews

were prohibited from changing their surnames without permission. In 1882 Alexander III had introduced a set of new laws that made life even more difficult for Jews, removing their right to vote in local elections or mortgage property and restricting their access to higher education with the imposition of quotas.

Iofan is a version of a more widely used Hebrew name, Jaffe, which has its roots in Prague. It was never common in Odessa, and in Boris Iofan's time there were no more than two or three families in the city who shared it. Before the revolution, the only legal way for the Iofans to take new names would have been to convert to Christianity. If they did this, it must have been after 1901, when Boris's elder brother Dmitry (b. 1885) graduated from Odessa's school of art and was still using his birth name, Shmul Iofan.

But based on Boris's later experience of being restricted in his studies by the quota laws, it seems more likely that the family never converted and simply rejected all religious associations. Boris, Dmitry and their sisters Raisa (b. 1885) and Anna (b. 1892) all adopted Mikhailovich or Mikhailovna as patronymic middle names in the Russian manner, rather than Solomonovich or Solomonovna. Changing his name was Iofan's response to Russia's vicious anti-Semitism – which existed both before and after the revolution – as well as a reflection of his embrace of militant secularism, which culminated with him joining Italy's Communist Party in 1921.

Boris's moderately prosperous parents did not have access to the Odessa of the very rich, with its seaside villas and private clubs, where English newspapers and French magazines were available in the same week they were published. Nor did they experience the squalor of Moldavanka, a sprawling shanty town on the city's north-eastern edge where day labourers and the destitute struggled to survive in a vodka-dulled haze of flophouses, licensed brothels and petty crime. They were somewhere in the respectable middle; Solomon Iofan probably made his living running a hotel. Later, when Soviet social engineering made even the most modest sign of privilege inadvisable, Boris apparently downgraded his father's occupation to the more proletarian-sounding one of hotel doorman, which is how he is described in Soviet-era reference books. His uncle Iosif was an engineer with an agricultural equipment business in the town of Aleksandrovska on the Dnieper River; by 1913 he had set up a subsidiary in Odessa, using Boris's family home as its official address.



Boris Iofan grew up in this apartment building near the centre of Odessa. His family had academics and businessmen as neighbours. The pair of classical *atlantes* guarding the entrance suggest an early inspiration for his use of the human figure as an architectural element.

The Iofans lived in a rented apartment on Elizavetskaya Street, one of a grid of tree-lined avenues marking out Odessa's city centre. Their home occupied part of a floor of number 1, a substantial four-storey building dating from the 1840s, designed in the form of a palazzo with a rusticated base and pilasters two storeys high supporting an entablature and a pediment. At the time they moved in, the building had been newly remodelled by César Zelinsky, a leading local architect. Zelinsky had embellished the entrance arch that gave access to the block's inner courtyard with a pair of *atlantes*, classical figures visibly struggling from the effort of carrying the whole world on their bare shoulders.

There is a photograph of Iofan as a baby, balanced on his mother's knee; she is a darkly elegant, fine-featured woman. Iofan's brother stands with them in an elaborately buttoned tunic and Eton collar. Their father, in a frock coat and neatly trimmed beard, sits next to his wife with their elder daughter in his arms. The family group presents a picture of middle-class respectability.

Diagonally across the street from the Iofans' home was what had previously been the Lycée Richelieu, Odessa's first elite secondary school, built in classical style on Deribasovskaya Street. By the Iofans' time, however, the original Lycée building was occupied by Novorossiisk University (where the young Leon Trotsky briefly studied) and the secondary school had moved to Elizavetskaya Street. Further along the street was a fashionable hydropathic establishment built in elaborate Moorish style, where the city's affluent residents indulged themselves in mud baths and spa treatments. The Iofans' neighbours included lawyers, academics and a number of scientists.

All the Iofan siblings had the benefit of an education. Boris and Dmitry became successful architects, while Anna was a teacher and moved to Moscow when the revolution removed restrictions on residency there. Raisa worked in Odessa as a midwife before she too relocated to Moscow; as adults, for a time, she, Anna and Boris lived in adjoining homes in an apartment building on Rusakovskaya Street. Golda, their mother, died in Moscow in 1930 and is buried in the city's Novodevichy Cemetery. The remains of Boris and his wife Olga are also marked there by a modest memorial of his own design.

The Iofans lived during a period of extreme disruption that included civil unrest, pogroms, two world wars, a revolution, a civil war and a series of purges, as well as the Holocaust. Throughout

decades of turbulence and appalling violence – affecting all Russians, but particularly targeted towards the Jewish population – somehow the whole family not only survived, but maintained their closeness.

During Boris's childhood, Odessa was a boom town. Its harbour was full of ships servicing the grain trade that underpinned the city's economy. At the time of his birth it had a population of 400,000, having doubled in size over the previous decade; by the time he left for St Petersburg in 1911, this had grown to 650,000. From 1911 onwards, there was an electric tram network. With its department stores, fashionable restaurants, shopping arcades and a museum of art and archaeology boasting an impressive collection of Hellenic antiquities, it certainly looked the model of a modern city. As with the rest of Russia, however, it was becoming clear that Odessa's prosperity rested on an unstable foundation of social inequality and was undermined by an arbitrary, incompetent central government.

For much of the 19th century Odessa, fast-growing and cosmopolitan from its first foundation, offered more opportunities than were available elsewhere in the so-called Pale of Settlement – the zone Catherine the Great had defined as being open to her Jewish subjects, in legislation that also served to exclude them from every other part of Russia. The restrictions on the occupations open to Jews elsewhere in the empire did not apply in Odessa; the city allowed residents who had come from anywhere the chance to make money legally in any way that they could. If they made enough of it, they lived and spent it wherever they wished.

These were attractions that drew migrants from all over Europe. In 1850, one Odessa citizen in five was Jewish. When Iofan was born the city had 140,000 Jewish residents – 35 per cent of the population – making Jews second in number only to the city's ethnic Russians. St Petersburg, where Jews were required to secure a residency permit, had fewer than 20,000 Jews in a population of more than a million people.

Jewish life in Odessa was very different from the conservative traditions of rural Eastern European Jewry at the time. The city developed a secular culture that provoked sharp conflict between modernizers and the Orthodox devout. Many Jews, Boris Iofan among them, saw assimilation into contemporary Russian society as the only way forward. But during his teenage years, two-thirds of the city's Jewish students still spoke Yiddish rather than Russian at home – and it was in Odessa that the Zionist movement took shape, spurred on in part by recurring pogroms that reached a horrifying climax in three days of appalling bloodshed witnessed by fourteen-year-old Boris in October 1905. If helping to modernize Russia was not going to be open to them, the Zionists resolved to build a progressive state of their own.

These disparate and conflicting strands contributed to the development of a distinctive Jewish Odessa, one that had its own approach to culture, religion and politics and would influence other Jewish communities. The city set a model for modern forms of religious observance and was also a vibrant centre for secular Jewish life, particularly in the areas of music and Yiddish theatre. The celebrated writer Isaac Babel, a contemporary of Iofan's, used his memories of growing up in the city for *Odessa Tales*, a collection of short stories exploring the criminal underclass that dominated the Moldavanka area.

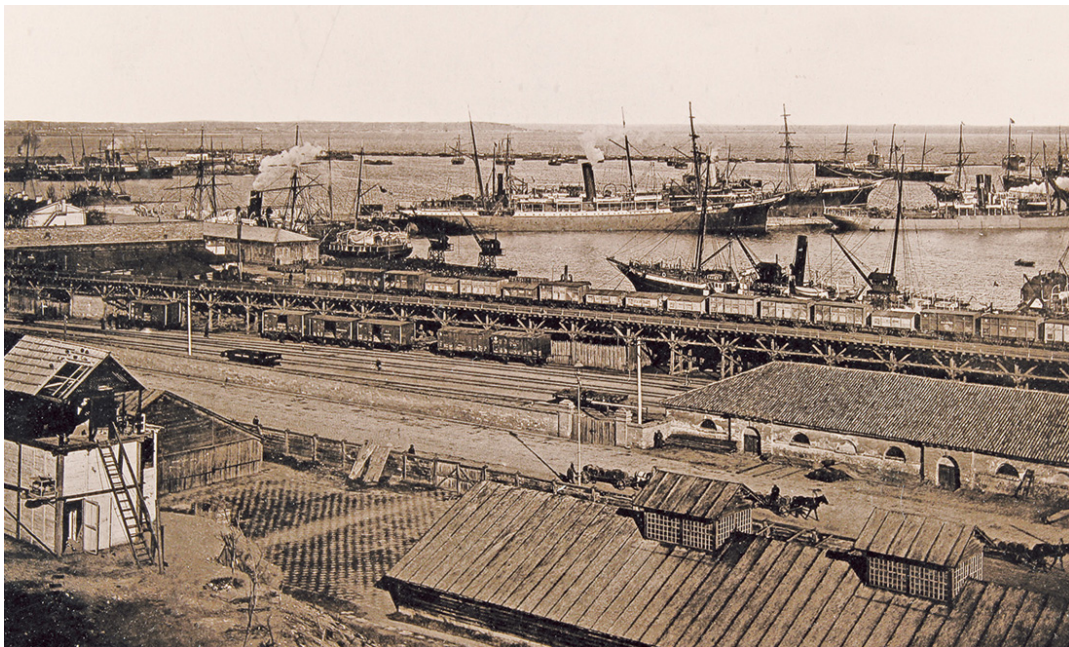
While Odessa's Jewish roots were an important part of its character, they represented only one aspect of the rich cultural mix in which Iofan grew up. At the end of the 19th century, the city's ethnic diversity gave it a character more akin to contemporary Constantinople, Salonika or Trieste – each with Greek, Slav, Jewish and Turkish quarters that had their own schools, religion and cuisine – than to the western Mediterranean port cities of Marseilles or Genoa with which it was often compared. Like Shanghai in the 1920s, an extra-territorial port run by foreigners on Chinese soil, the business life and administration of Odessa was contracted to others by Imperial Russia. The city had a French-language newspaper before it had a Russian one, and in the early days its street signs were produced in Italian as well as Russian for the benefit of citizens unfamiliar with Cyrillic script. The foundation stone for the opera house was laid before that of the Russian Orthodox cathedral.

During the 19th century Odessa had been transformed with remarkable speed from a Tartar settlement of a few hundred people, built around a Turkish fortress, to the fourth-largest city in the Russian empire after St Petersburg, Moscow and Warsaw. This process was a systematically planned

piece of Imperialist expansionism. From 1795 onwards, the city leaders set out to attract ambitious and economically useful colonists of whatever nationality: ethnic German farmers, Italian architects, Greek traders. Its streets were populated by members of all of these groups along with Bulgarians, Turks and Albanians, some habitually in national costume, others fashionably dressed in modern metropolitan style.

Russia gave classically inspired names to the new cities it established in its recently conquered territories (collectively known as Novorossiia – New Russia) to suggest that they had roots in ancient Greece. Odessa is named in tribute to Odysseus; Sevastopol is a derivation of Greek words for the ancient, venerable, or holy city; Tiraspol in Moldavia takes its name from Tyras, the Greek name for the Dniester River. All this seems to have been a carefully considered branding strategy, aimed at encouraging settlers from western Europe and peeling back the traces of Mongol, Tartar and Turkic history to give the impression of a modern city with ancient European roots.

Armand-Emmanuel de Vignerot du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, was the first of a series of governors whose shrewd policies ensured that Odessa had an openness unusual in the Russian empire. Richelieu, a descendant of Louis XIV's famous cardinal, had been a French royalist and a soldier in the service of Marie Antoinette. Having escaped from the revolution in Paris that saw his monarch guillotined, he offered his services to the Russian empire. He then distinguished himself in the Russian army and was appointed governor of Odessa in 1803.



Odessa owed its prosperity and its place as the fourth-largest city in the Russian empire to its harbour and its privileges as a free port. Grain from its Ukrainian hinterland was exported around the world. During the *Potemkin* mutiny of 1905, the battleship moored here, provoking serious bloodshed.

Richelieu set out to strengthen the city's Greek origin myth by investing in neoclassical architecture. He commissioned the Swiss-French architect Jean-François Thomas de Thomon, responsible for some of St Petersburg's finest buildings, to design Odessa's opera house, which opened in 1810. Odessa's City Hall, originally built to house the city's Bourse, followed in the 1820s. It was designed by Francesco Boffo and Gregorio Torcelli in a style that acknowledged de Thomon's work, with a giant Corinthian colonnade as the dominant element of its main façade. Richelieu's successor was Comte Louis Alexandre Andrault de Langeron, another aristocratic French exile and soldier with an equally impressive military record: he had fought against the British in the American revolutionary war and then against Napoleon in Europe. De Langeron succeeded in turning Odessa into a free port, a status it retained for the next forty years and that represented another vital step in its strategic development.

Francesco Boffo became Odessa's official architect. He built the governor's palace for Mikhail Vorontsov (the city's first Russian-born governor, a Cambridge-educated anglophile); he also designed the Primorsky Boulevard, a promenade lined by palatial houses following the cliff-top shoreline. It is the most impressive piece of urban scenery in the city. Its centrepiece is a handsome, larger-than-life bronze statue of Richelieu standing on a marble plinth. He is portrayed as a young man dressed in a Roman toga, his brow garlanded with a laurel wreath.

Boffo's most famous work, however, is one of Europe's grandest staircases. The 200 treads of the Odessa Steps, arranged in ten flights, linked the cliff-top city with its port, allowing the refined neighbourhoods above to look down on the quarantine harbours, jetties and raw docks below. An English engineer of dubious reputation was engaged to build the monumental installation, using sandstone shipped from Trieste for the steps. The stone quickly eroded in the salt air, and the steps have since been relaid using harder-wearing local granite.

The flaking stone steps are famously seen in close-up during Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* massacre scenes, filmed in Odessa in 1925. The success of the film led to the staircase being renamed the 'Potemkin Steps' during the Soviet era, even though the events Eisenstein depicted – a runaway pram and advancing ranks of soldiers carrying rifles with bayonets fixed, shooting down ordinary citizens who crumple and fall, all seen cinematically through a pair of smashed spectacles – did not take place as he portrayed them.

The steps are set out at an angle that makes them seem to disappear when viewed from the summit, leaving only the ten flat landing levels visible. Looking up from the level of the harbour, it is the horizontal landings that become invisible while the steps appear as a solid, visually dominant vertical wall. Boffo made them considerably wider at the bottom than the top, creating an optical illusion that accentuated the effect of perspective and made the Richelieu statue appear larger and more impressive when seen from below.



Odessa sits on a headland connected to its port by the famous steps. A statue of the Duc de Richelieu, the city's first governor, stands at the top. Iofan's plan for the Soviet pavilion in Paris put Stalin in a similar position, at the head of the central stairway.

It is easy to see how the image of Richelieu's bronze head strikingly juxtaposed against the architectural context of Odessa would have become an essential point of reference for Iofan, a young art student with highly developed powers of observation who spent his time haunting the city's public spaces and exploring its architectural features. The *atlantes* flanking the entrance to his Elizavetskaya Street home were another key image. Clear traces of his memories of Odessa – most strikingly, the steps

and the figures – can be found in his own later work. His memory of the Odessa Steps may have had something to do with the organization of the interior of his Soviet pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition: it had a sequence of broad stairs interrupted by landings as its centrepiece, with a statue of Lenin as its climax. Iofan positioned a GAZ limousine, the unreliable pride of the fledgling Soviet car industry, on the first landing.

Odessa's embrace of its coastal setting served as a precedent for Iofan's approach to the rebuilding of Stalingrad and Novorossiisk after their wartime destruction. In each case, his masterplan made use of the city's relationship with water as a starting point. Little more than a fragment of Iofan's plan for Novorossiisk was realized, however; and there is nothing at all of his plan in Stalingrad, or Volgograd, as it is now.

Richelieu had envisioned Odessa as a southern version of St Petersburg, an elegant, cultured city without the winter ice. But by the time the Iofan brothers were growing up there, the city's grandeur and coherence had become blurred by the reality of urban life in a boom town. Half a century of continuous growth had made it a brasher and more ostentatious place than Richelieu or de Langeron had anticipated. Every new building competed with its predecessors in an attempt to present the most ornate and elaborately over-decorated façade. The neoclassical purity of the Bourse was compromised by Francesco Morandi's alterations of 1871, when he turned it into the City Hall. Thomas de Thomon's chaste Doric opera house burned to the ground and was replaced in 1886 with a blowsy but briefly fashionable new building designed in Vienna by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, whose partnership became an architectural production line that eventually churned out more than forty theatres, opera houses and concert halls throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Balkans and western Russia. They pleased crowds all the way from the Italian border to Bucharest, but their work usually took the form of a decorative crust for a technically impressive auditorium.



The foundations for Odessa's first opera house were laid before the city built its first Orthodox cathedral. A fire destroyed the neoclassical original building. Its florid replacement (above) was designed by a fashionable architectural practice from Vienna.

To judge by Boris Iofan's later enthusiasm for what he called a 'laconic' form of classicism, he had looked carefully at the Odessa of his youth and drawn his own conclusions about what he described as the 'disastrous architecture of the 1880s'. It was a judgment that had already been decisively delivered in the architecture school of St Petersburg's Academy of Fine Art, perhaps Russia's most influential forum for debate on such issues of architectural aesthetics. By the time Boris's elder brother Dmitry arrived in St Petersburg around 1901, the so-called 'modern style' – an uneasy mix of *Jugendstil* and art nouveau, spiced with references to the old Russian vernacular – had already been written off as a passing fad.

The architect Francesco Morandi had trained in Milan before spending most of his working life in Odessa. He designed the city's main synagogue, on the corner of Richelieu Street, as well as the Catholic cathedral. He led the establishment of what was originally known as the Odessa Drawing School – today, the Grekov Odessa Art School – and designed its first permanent building. Mitrofan Grekov, who gave the school its later name, was a painter and a contemporary of Dmitry Iofan both in Odessa and at the academy in St Petersburg; he fought in the Red Army cavalry during the Russian civil war and made his name with epic-scale realist battle paintings that set the stage for the emergence of socialist realism.

The Drawing School had its origins in the Odessa Society of Fine Arts, founded in 1865 as an independent charity, 'the purpose of which should be to develop the taste and concept of painting in all classes of citizens, as well as to establish a public art gallery in Odessa; and in it, a drawing school in which artisans could study drawing and drawing technique'.¹ Its classes took place in temporary accommodation in a succession of buildings around the city, and were free to those without the means to pay. This support would account for as many as half of the 200 students at the school, some as young as seven. In its early days the school presented itself as offering a morally improving mission; there was a Sunday drawing school, and a separate class for young women. As one contemporary observed: 'Classes distracted children from harmful idleness by harnessing them to work and giving nourishment to a younger generation looking for useful activities and intellectual development.'²

The Society soon developed cultural ambitions beyond self-improvement. It offered an increasing range of formal courses and established an officially recognized secondary school that provided a general education for younger pupils. Unlike the government schools in Odessa, this independent art school had no quota restricting Jewish students.

Morandi's new red-brick building, with its double-height, north-light studios, opened in 1885 on Preobrazhenskaya Street, not far from the Iofans' home. It accommodated both the art school, which now offered courses in painting, sculpture and architecture, and the secondary school. Morandi used his connections in Milan to acquire a set of casts made from the Brera Academy's impressive collection of plaster reproductions of the masterpieces of classical sculpture. They ranged from a selection from the Parthenon marbles to the Sleeping Hermaphroditus (a Roman copy of a bronze original that is now in the Louvre) and Michelangelo's four figures from the tombs of Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici. He shipped them all to Odessa and donated them to the school, where they became the basis for instructing generations of students; half a century later they would inspire Iofan's designs for giant statues of Marx and Engels, intended to embellish the Palace of the Soviets. Morandi also bequeathed his own collection of art books, prints and engravings to the school library.

Morandi recruited Luigi Iorini, an Italian sculptor who had also trained in Milan, to teach in Odessa, and together they worked on a number of Morandi's building projects. The most prominent of these was a commission for Iorini to make statues of Ceres and Mercury (symbolizing the spirits of agriculture and trade that had helped Odessa prosper) to embellish Morandi's remodelling of the façade of City Hall.

As both of the Iofan brothers showed a natural ability for drawing, the art school was an obvious place for them to study; Isaak Eigel, in his monograph, also mentions their artistic cousin Sofia as an influence. And in a city growing as fast as Odessa, pursuing a career in architecture seemed like a promising option for students with skills like theirs. Their professor of painting was Kiriak Kostandi, an

ethnic Greek artist who had himself been a student at the school in Odessa. Kostandi had gone on to study at the Imperial Academy in St Petersburg, graduating in 1882, and then returned home to become a teacher and open his own studio. While in St Petersburg, he had joined the Peredvizhniki movement – the so-called ‘Wanderers’, a group that began when the 1863 graduating class of painters started a revolution at the academy. In the time-honoured manner of radical students at art schools everywhere, the Wanderers refused to carry out the required diploma painting project. They condemned it as out of touch and impossibly old-fashioned. Instead they wanted to make art out of the everyday experience of ordinary Russians, and they rejected the formal practices and subject matter of the academy.

The Wanderers organized an annual programme of travelling exhibitions that took art out of the capital and sent it on tour to provincial galleries, where ordinary Russians throughout the country could see it. Their work soon came to represent the Russian mainstream, and members of the Wanderers eventually took over the academy itself. In time, however, another generation developed to supplant them, just as they had turned against their own professors. This new movement in St Petersburg took its name from *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*), a magazine started by Serge Diaghilev, and had a determinedly avant-garde and Western-orientated stance. Dmitry Iofan, who like Boris had an interest in art as well as architecture, was influenced by it and later took part in at least one of its exhibitions.

Collectively, Morandi, Iorini and Kostandi succeeded in establishing an international reputation for the Odessa school, to the extent that it began attracting students from throughout Russia and even further afield. Students came from Lvov, from Moscow, even from Tripoli and Vienna. Wassily Kandinsky’s family moved to Odessa in 1871 when he was five, and he was one of many who took junior drawing classes there. Yakov Chernikov, two years older than Boris Iofan, started at Odessa’s art school in 1907. He went on to produce a remarkable series of speculative architectural drawings that prophesied the spatial and structural possibilities of new materials and modern technology. Many of those who would go on to define art in the Soviet Union – the radicals as well as the social realists – were educated in Odessa.

Despite insisting that male students dress in brass-buttoned, military-style tunics (almost all Russian students at the time wore uniforms of some kind), Odessa was an unusually progressive school. Eigel suggests that the majority of its students were the children of workers or peasants, and that Iofan’s time at the school shaped what Eigel calls his ‘class consciousness’.³ Female students were accepted in the senior school and classes were co-educational. Iofan learned life drawing, rendering measured drawings and surveying.

In the early 1890s, it had been designated as a school under the supervision of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, St Petersburg. This arrangement allowed Odessa’s best painting graduates (although not its architects) to go on to the academy, bypassing the 3 per cent quota that restricted Jewish admissions from students applying through other routes. In 1911, having finished his studies in Odessa, Boris collected the diploma that qualified him as an architectural technician; he then left for St Petersburg to join Dmitry, who had moved there ten years earlier. However, owing to the quota laws, he was unable to follow his brother to the Academy of Fine Arts.

By the early 20th century, Russia’s changing politics had already begun to make Odessa a less welcoming city. For fifty years in the mid-19th century, its Jewish citizens had been able to take part in local government elections; but Tsar Alexander III, anxious about losing control of the empire, abolished this right in 1882. Instead of elections, city council members would be appointed by the governor, with just six out of sixty seats reserved for the Jewish community despite their much larger numbers as a proportion of the population. In a similar pattern, education in Odessa had once been open to all; but by the time of Iofan’s birth, quotas had been imposed on Jewish students accepted at its university, its gymnasia and its other state schools. The exception was the privately run art school, where admission depended only on a portfolio.

Such discrimination brought Odessa into line with the rest of the empire, where quotas limited Jewish entry to state schools and universities to correspond notionally to the percentage of the Jewish population: 10 per cent in the Pale and 3 per cent in other parts of the empire. A failure to invest in the port and its infrastructure was another sign of things going wrong. Odessa’s early governors had been

effective in steering the city through epidemics of plague and cholera, economic downturns and periodic bursts of intercommunal violence. They had established effective quarantine policies, put in place an equitable legal system and built a railway network that connected Odessa first to Kiev and then to far-away Moscow and St Petersburg. But as the Russian empire reached its final act, Richelieu's successors were notably less adept at managing a local economy that had been badly damaged by the fallout from Russia's war with Japan in 1904, as well as the horrific violence of the 1905 revolution that followed.

Street fights between Greek and Jewish Odessians had led to bloodshed at least three times during the 19th century, but what happened in 1905, when Iofan was fourteen years old, was on an entirely different scale. There were two connected outbreaks of violence: one was a massacre and the other can only be called genocide. Cities all across the Russian empire were overwhelmed by a revolutionary uprising against the tsar. Odessa's industrial workers, supported by the city's secondary school students, staged a general strike. At the same time the crew of the battleship *Potemkin* from the Black Sea fleet mutinied. To show support for the strikers and the mutineers, red banners, red carpets and even red mattresses were draped from windows and balconies throughout the city – but there were also many in the city who were ready to support a violent reaction against the radicals.

The crisis came to a head when the *Potemkin* anchored in Odessa's harbour. The strikers, carrying banners and flags, crowded into the port to meet the mutineers and the army intervened to drive them back into town. The crew on the battleship fired a couple of shells at the opera house, believing that army staff had set up a command post there. They missed their target. Meanwhile the insurrectionary violence on shore worsened, with an arson attack on the harbour installations sparking a deadly fire in the dockside warehouses. The army started shooting at the mobs, some of whom were armed and fired back; the combined effects of gunfire and the warehouse blaze resulted in many deaths. Soviet historiography claimed as many as 1,500 revolutionary martyrs in Odessa, while the police report counted just fifty-seven dead civilians, one soldier and one policeman. The reality is more likely to have run into hundreds of dead and wounded. The *Potemkin* then steamed away in an unsuccessful attempt to rally support for the revolution from the rest of the Black Sea fleet.

Once the street battles had ended, the government regained control of the city and attempted to blame the carnage on agitators who were either Jewish or social democrats (the forerunners of the Bolsheviks) – or both. In the months that followed, the tsar's secret police formulated plans to incite communal violence to weaken and discredit their political opponents. In this they had the enthusiastic support of local chapters of the Black Hundreds movement, a viciously anti-Semitic, ultra-nationalist and extremely violent pro-royalist group.

In October of the same year there was a second outbreak of bloodshed, this time explicitly targeting Odessa's Jewish residents. Four days of horror ensued. Barricades were set up at the end of the Iofans' street and around their neighbourhood in an attempt to keep out rioters from the burning slums of the Moldavanka, where the worst violence took place. Mobs went from house to house, killing, raping and torturing. Even some of the local police reportedly took part in the attacks, and at first the army refused to intervene while entire families were being systematically murdered. Violence broke out everywhere: even the privileged city centre saw random individual attacks, shootings and widespread looting. Buildings were burned and mutilated bodies left in the streets. It was a terrifying ordeal for families like the Iofans; the doors of their home on Elizavetskaya Street were kept locked and barred, the window shutters closed. In this part of the city, the able-bodied armed themselves; some Gentiles and Jews acted together to defend their property as well as Jewish lives.

The entire city was convulsed with horrific violence for most of a week. When the bloodshed finally ceased, the *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent reported witnessing hundreds of Jewish victims being buried in mass graves. Most had been murdered by mobs armed with pistols, clubs and axes; more than fifty of the Jewish dead had joined armed self-defence groups and been killed in the fighting. For days afterwards the streets were left in chaos, filled with broken glass and wreckage. Corpses were gathered and laid out in rows so that survivors could identify their relatives and friends. Several thousand Odessians, left homeless and destitute by the pogrom, had to be temporarily housed in a tent city on the grounds of the Jewish hospital.

The violence came to an end only after the belated intervention of the army, and a form of normality reasserted itself. Some of the perpetrators were arrested and put on trial, but most of those convicted were eventually pardoned. Iofan was able to return to school; his father's hotel reopened. But the experience had long-term consequences, one of which was a substantial increase in migration. Odessa's Jewish residents began to join the hundreds of thousands of others leaving Russia for America, Britain, Latin America, South Africa and Palestine.

Dmitry Iofan had already left Odessa for St Petersburg, a city that had never seen a pogrom – perhaps because it had very few Jewish residents and, with its concentration of barracks, an overwhelming military presence. By the time Dmitry arrived there, the Imperial Academy had been through a process of reform that lifted it out of a decade-long creative paralysis.

The academy was based in a magnificent 18th-century building with its four quadrangles, circular central courtyard and heroic façade overlooking the Neva River. Since it offered free tuition as well as access to generous scholarships, there was fierce competition for the handful of places offered each year. Teaching was organized into masterclasses based on individual architects, artists and sculptors; the most popular professors tended to be oversubscribed, while others struggled to attract students. The curriculum was more flexible at this point than it had previously been, allowing students to choose some of their own projects to work on. The course structure for architecture had diverged from that for painting, with architecture students expected to study mathematics and physics as well as drawing and composition. The academy's only real rival was Moscow's privately funded school of architecture and design.

For any architecture student, the extraordinary classical heritage of St Petersburg – going all the way back to the foundation of the city in 1703 – and its ability to attract outstanding architects from all over Europe, from Scotland to Italy, would have had a profound impact. Most responded by respecting the city's architectural traditions. But for some, the reaction was a determination to break with the past and invent a radical new architectural language. Dmitry Iofan – who was a student of Leon Benois, the dean of the academy and a passionate advocate of classicism – certainly belonged to the former group, at least initially. Benois's brother was a co-founder of *Mir iskusstva*, the art movement with which Dmitry would associate himself.

Graduates from the academy dominated the architectural profession both before and after the revolution. Aleksei Shchusev, primarily a traditionalist who began by restoring churches across Russia but went on to design Lenin's tomb, graduated in 1897; Ivan Zholtovsky, who left the academy in 1898, designed Moscow's Tarasov House, a scholarly reworking of a Florentine palazzo. After the revolution he claimed that Palladianism, which he had come to know well during his many journeys to Italy, was the most appropriate architectural style for the proletariat. Notable students in Dmitry's time included Ivan Fomin, who had turned his back on the art nouveau work he had undertaken in Moscow before coming to study in St Petersburg and, like Zholtovsky, absorbed the neoclassical essence of the city. By 1912 Fomin was working on a development on the island of Golodai, a massive, classically inspired expansion of St Petersburg that was only partially realized. Vladimir Shchuko graduated in 1904 and his younger partner, Vladimir Gelfreikh, was Dmitry's exact contemporary. Twenty years later, they would find themselves competing for control of the design of the Palace of the Soviets in Boris Iofan's Kremlin studio.

Dmitry Iofan graduated in 1911, the same year that his brother arrived in what was then the capital of Russia. By this time he had already worked on building a school in Yekaterinburg with Pavel Svetlitsky. In the three years before the outbreak of war Dmitry benefited from the city's building boom, designing two prominent projects. First, he won a competition for the design of the main treasury building of the Imperial Bank, sited on the Fontanka River opposite Carlo Rastrelli's sublime baroque masterpiece, the Vorontsov Palace. The treasury building's palatial façade is relatively restrained, with shallow niches and pilasters. Its spectacular interior is dominated by a circular banking hall 100 feet high, topped by a glass dome and formed by a giant Ionic colonnade. The competition specified a choice of two sites; Dmitry created a scheme for each of them, and so succeeded in collecting two first prizes. His design, jointly submitted with Sergei Serafimovich, seven years his senior and a fellow alumnus of

the Odessa Art School, was handed over to the bank's own engineer to build and was completed in 1913.

Dmitry's second major design in St Petersburg – on which Boris, with the romantic long hair of his art school days neatly shorn, and by now wearing a professional-looking moustache, probably assisted him – was at 5 Kuibysheva Street: a mainly residential building, with commercial space behind a palatial façade with a colonnade at street level.

At the beginning of 1913 the German embassy in St Petersburg, designed by Peter Behrens, was officially opened; Behrens' brilliant assistant, Mies van der Rohe, was responsible for building it. He appears to have used the opportunity to explore the treatment of a re-entrant corner using stone and classical details that he would later revisit in steel I-beams at New York's Seagram Tower. Despite the embassy's austere and dignified design – with eighteen red granite columns inset into a shallow porch running the length of the building, almost flush with the entablature, so that it appears to be channelling the ghost of Karl Friedrich Schinkel – most Russian architects seemed unimpressed with it, possibly because of the increasing enmity between the tsar and the kaiser. The 1913 issue of *Moskovsky arkhitekturny mir* (*Moscow Architectural World*) however, discussed it with enthusiasm, and it would certainly have been closely examined by both Iofan brothers. Its icy self-control, intimidating presence and unmistakable projection of power would provide material for the most sober of Boris Iofan's classical buildings designed in the 1940s.

As the years passed, the Iofan brothers seem to have coped well with the tensions that must have arisen from their changing professional fortunes. As the elder of the two, Dmitry was naturally in the ascendant to begin with: he secured a place at the most prestigious architecture school in the empire and sent textbooks home to Odessa for Boris. Meanwhile Boris, even as he moved from secondary school to art school and showed great facility with paint, charcoal and pencil, remained convinced that his future lay in architecture – but when the time came, he was unable to get into the academy in St Petersburg.

According to Isaak Eigel, Boris then spent a brief period in the army in the Crimean town of Feodosiya. After this, Dmitry helped him come to St Petersburg. Boris, a charming and determined young man, soon found work not only assisting on his brother's projects but also with one of the most original talents in the city, the Armenian architect Aleksandr Tamanyan. After the revolution, Tamanyan moved to Yerevan and developed a modern form of traditional Armenian architecture; but while Boris worked for him in St Petersburg he was an accomplished and inventive classicist, building, among other things, a development for Prince Shcherbatov in Moscow combining an art gallery, club and apartments with a palatial residence for the prince. It foreshadowed the range of facilities that would later be on offer in Boris's House on the Embankment.

Although he was unable to acquire the qualifications in Russia that he needed to become an architect, living in St Petersburg gave Boris an opportunity to begin mixing in the same circles as architects who would dominate the profession after the revolution. Gifted Jewish students were accustomed to being compelled to leave Russia and study abroad because of the discriminatory quota system. Many went to Germany or Austria, but with tensions between Berlin and Moscow rising ahead of the First World War (and perhaps influenced by Odessa's Italian connections), Boris chose Rome instead. Dmitry lent him the money to continue his studies, and Boris left the country just before he would have been conscripted into the coming war. During his time in Rome he kept up a regular stream of correspondence, sending Dmitry postcard images of the city's classical sites.

Soon after this, their relative positions began to shift. The impact of the First World War stalled Dmitry's promising career: the longer the fighting went on, the more difficult conditions became. After the revolution, building commissions disappeared altogether. It was only when Boris finally returned to Russia in 1924 that, thanks to his younger brother's political connections, Dmitry was able to build again.

Dmitry was an accomplished artist as well as an architect, and continued to paint while he practised architecture. He showed two of his vivid landscapes painted in the Caucasus in 1917 at the *Mir iskusstva* group exhibition of that year. While he never joined the Communist Party, he did remain in St

Petersburg (renamed in 1914 to become the less Germanic-sounding Petrograd), where he was a witness to the revolution.

After the disastrous course of the war with Germany, Nicholas II, the last Russian tsar, was removed from power by a provisional government led by Aleksandr Kerensky. He abdicated early in 1917. Lenin returned to Petrograd from exile in Switzerland with the cooperation of a Germany still at war with Russia, while Kerensky's provisional government stood by its treaty obligations to Britain and France. As the leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin established the Politburo with Trotsky, Stalin, Grigory Zinoviev, Grigory Sokolnikov and Lev Kamenev to plan their seizure of power while they took part in Russia's first democratic local government elections.

The Bolshevik manifesto for the first and last relatively free Moscow elections had a strong urban and architectural aspect. It called for the nationalization of all urban land, the municipalization of local transport and utilities, a massive house-building programme and improved civic amenities – tarmac streets, lighting, sewers, clean water and new parks. The electorate, however, was not convinced that the Leninists could deliver their promises. Of 647,000 votes cast the Bolsheviks won just 75,000, trailing three other parties.

Although they failed to win a popular mandate, the Bolsheviks were able to seize power from the provisional government. The armed coup in Petrograd lasted just a few hours, but was the prelude to four years of traumatic warfare. Moscow, a city of somewhat less than two million people, was designated the capital of the new state five months after the revolution – restored to the role it had lost when Peter the Great moved his government to St Petersburg, his newly built window to the West, two hundred years earlier. The communists took this decision for strategic reasons: the peace treaties they struck with Germany had lost Russia its Baltic provinces, leaving Petrograd dangerously exposed to advancing German troops and hostile Finns just twenty miles away.

The revolutionaries left Petrograd in secret and based themselves in Moscow in the mansions, monasteries and schools commandeered from their dispossessed former owners. At first Lenin and the Central Committee lived in what had been the National Hotel, requisitioned and renamed the First House of the Soviets. As the new regime consolidated its grip, however, it took over the Kremlin complex at the heart of old Moscow, which had been shelled and badly damaged during the uprising. It expelled the court servants, the retainers, the monks and the nuns from the two abbeys in the complex. Lenin and those closest to him were allocated apartments in what had once been the barracks of the Guards regiment inside the Kremlin.

As the new order became permanent, Lenin and his followers began work on transforming their capital. Their plans went beyond the utilitarian. Lenin published a decree, *On the Removal of Monuments Raised in Honour of the Tsars and Their Servants and the Working Out of Designs for Monuments to the Russian Socialist Revolution*, suggesting what was to come: a scheme that was designed to include the whole country. His close associate Maksim Gorky was inspired by the utopian message of Italian friar Tommaso Campanella: in his 1602 book *City of the Sun* Campanella had envisaged a utopia based on liberty and sexual equality, in which manual labour was honoured and the city itself was decorated in such a way as to spell out its guiding principles. Gorky gave Lenin the idea that the Soviet revolution could make its mark on Soviet cities in a similar way.

A commission was established to produce a list of some sixty individuals, ranging from Spartacus to Charles Darwin, to be honoured by new monuments. The first of these was erected in Petrograd in September 1918 in tribute to the radical writer Aleksandr Radishchev, exiled by Catherine the Great and claimed by the party as a forefather of Bolshevism. Meanwhile, the statue of Alexander II in the Kremlin and that of Alexander III in front of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour were both destroyed. An obelisk in the Aleksandrovsky Garden, erected just before the First World War to celebrate 300 years of the Romanov dynasty, had its imperial insignia and list of tsars chiselled off to make room for the intellectual ancestors of socialism: Marx and Engels, born in Germany; Campanella the Italian; Thomas More and Gerrard Winstanley from England. Close by, a statue of Robespierre was unveiled at the end of 1918 and mysteriously fell to pieces a few days later. The Bolsheviks blamed counter-revolutionary sabotage, but the more prosaic truth may be that frost damage destroyed the poor-quality concrete in

which it had been cast. Lenin personally took part in the tearing down of a memorial to Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, who, in his time as governor of Moscow, was held partly responsible for the tragic loss of 1,000 lives in a stampede at the celebrations for the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II.

On the first anniversary of the revolution Lenin unveiled the Liberty Obelisk, also known as the monument to the Soviet constitution, by Dmitry Osipov and Nikolai Andreyev. It took the place of a statue of General Mikhail Skobelev, a hero of the wars in the Caucasus. At the same time, the Soviets set about renaming any streets with names that glorified the old regime. Among the first to be changed were what had been called the 'Square of the Resurrection' in Moscow – it became Revolution Square – and Staraya Basmannaya Street, which turned into Karl Marx Street.

The artist Nathan Altman, who had studied at the Odessa Art School at the same time as Boris and knew both of the Iofan brothers, had arrived in St Petersburg from Paris in 1912. Along with his avant-garde colleague Kazimir Malevich, he joined the board for artistic matters of the People's Commissariat of Culture. He painted Anna Akhmatova's portrait in 1914 and later, in Moscow in 1927, that of Iofan's friend, the theatre director Solomon Mikhoels. Altman also met Lenin and took part in the competition to design the first postage stamps for the new state. Most impressively of all, he transformed Petrograd's Palace Square to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution. He led a team of artists, including Dmitry Iofan, in reinventing it as the site of a revolutionary festival on the anniversary of the storming of the Winter Palace. The equilibrium of its monumental classical façades was shattered by a layer of vividly coloured canvas panels positioned around the square that suggested the impact of the new political order. This was the project that moved Vladimir Mayakovsky to write: 'Street brooms our brushes, and public places our palettes.'⁴

By this time, Dmitry had married his first wife and they had a young son. They left Russia to live in Paris, but shortly afterwards Dmitry secured a teaching position at an art school in the small Russian city of Penza and left his family in France to take it up. He worked as an assistant to David Buryshkin, another product of the academy in St Petersburg, in the architecture workshop that was established in Penza early in 1919. It was around this point that Boris, who had graduated in Rome and started to find his own architectural commissions, began to overtake his brother professionally.

During the course of the civil war the Iofans' home city of Odessa changed hands several times, being occupied successively by Austro-Hungarians, White Russians, Ukrainians, the French and the Red Army. It was not until 1920 that Soviet control was finally consolidated. Odessa, along with the territory of which it was part, was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In the decades that followed, war and communism weakened everything that had once made Odessa's culture so distinctive. Jewish religious observance, like that of the city's other faiths, was suppressed by the new state; Jewish schools were closed, leaving only the Yiddish theatre and language; and in October 1941, every remaining vestige of Jewish identity was temporarily extinguished in horrific circumstances.

The Germans and their Romanian allies had launched an attack on the Soviet Union a few months earlier. They took control of Odessa after an eight-week siege. Those of its Jewish citizens who could do so, like the Iofans, had already left; of those who remained, few would survive. As many as 20,000 people were slaughtered in the streets by the Romanians, running riot in the first week of the occupation after a bomb left behind by the retreating Red Army killed their commander. By the spring of 1942, the death toll of civilians murdered in or near Odessa had risen to 150,000 – the victims of mass executions, forced marches and concentration camps.

The world that had made Boris Iofan was gone. The Romanians ransacked Odessa, looting even the art school's plaster casts that he and Dmitry had sketched as students. Neither of the Iofan brothers had ever built in the city where they were born and raised, and they never would. But in 1960, after Odessa – along with Stalingrad, Kiev, Novorossiisk and eight other Soviet settlements – had been declared a 'hero city', Boris did take part in a competition to design a memorial for the city's war dead. He drew a mourning figure alongside a slender spire, sheltering an eternal flame at its base. He was not successful.

Rome

In travelling from St Petersburg to Rome early in 1914, Boris Iofan was following in the footsteps of Konstantin Thon, a court architect to Tsar Nicholas I. A century earlier, Thon had spent a decade in Italy and then, back in Russia, designed the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. It was this building that would later be dynamited to make way for Iofan's Palace of the Soviets, the commission that defined him as Stalin's state architect.



Iofan arrived in Rome as a student in 1914, and stayed to start his career as an increasingly politically active architect after he graduated in 1916.

In the years leading up to the First World War, the Grand Tour was still an essential part of a serious Russian architectural education. The architecture of classical Rome was a vital tradition for Iofan and many of his creative peers; it brought the monuments he had studied in Odessa and St Petersburg to life, giving them context and meaning. He wanted to learn from classicism at first hand by studying in Italy, like his older and more conservative rivals Ivan Zholtovsky and Aleksei Shchusev.

Zholtovsky had recently returned from Italy to Russia as an accomplished classicist, possessed of a first edition of Andrea Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura*. (He later claimed to have translated it into Russian, although recent research suggests he may have appropriated a translation by Elizaveta Ryabushinskaya.) The adaptable Shchusev successfully negotiated his own survival after the revolution by switching his focus from building Orthodox monasteries and churches to designing Lenin's mausoleum. Other Russian architects came back from Italy having learned different lessons from the experience. Moisei Ginzburg, who graduated from the Polytechnic of Milan in 1914, tried to define a new architectural language with his Narkomfin Building, a block of flats housing finance ministry staff and their families as well as smaller rooms for single workers. Designed in 1928, it anticipated Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles by twenty years.

Shchusev and the others had come from prosperous professional backgrounds; unlike them, Iofan had to borrow money to move to Italy, but he possessed enough self-belief, charm and ambition to make a success of the undertaking. He had also already seen something of the world beyond his home city, having worked on construction sites in Petrograd and Moscow. Shortly before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, he set out for Rome by way of Paris and Pisa (where the baptistry made a lasting impression on him), reaching Rome in time for the start of the autumn 1914 semester at the Regio Istituto Superiore di Belle Arti. He arrived in a city that within living memory had been declared the capital of a newly united Italy, a country that would avoid being drawn into the First World War for a few more months. With Dmitry's funds, Iofan enrolled at the school of architecture that had produced many of Italy's leading professionals.

Iofan's ten-year stay in Italy would have a profound impact on his future. It was here that he met his wife, Olga Sasso-Ruffo – although at the time she was still married to her first husband, Boris Ogarev, a playboy tsarist cavalry officer turned businessman. It was in Italy, too, that Iofan became politically active for the first time, joining the newly formed Italian Communist Party as well as starting his own studio and beginning to develop a distinctive architectural voice. He shaved off his moustache and took to wearing suits and stiff collars rather than Russian tunics.



The dome of the Salute church in Venice, sketched by Iofan from the terrace of the Bauer Hotel. Iofan was an accomplished draughtsman, whose drawings and watercolours from his years in Italy provided much of the source material for his architectural work.

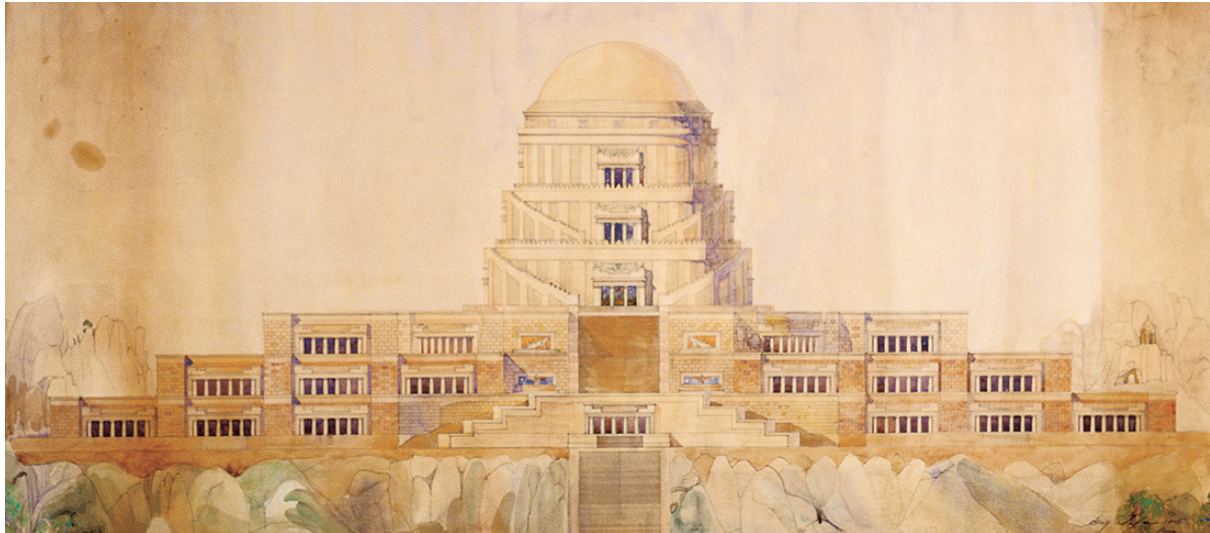
He also made other connections in Rome that would later sustain his career in the Soviet Union. Perhaps the most important of these was his friendship with Aleksei Rykov, the leading Bolshevik who succeeded Lenin as Soviet premier. In the spring of 1924 Rykov travelled to Italy with his wife, Nina Semyonovna Marshak, for what was described as a ‘private visit’; the Soviet Embassy asked Iofan to act as his guide and interpreter, and a friendship was born.

The Istituto Superiore di Belle Arti traces its origins back to the papacy and the Accademia di San Luca, established in the 16th century. By 1914 it was under royal patronage and had moved to the former Chamber of Commerce building on the via di Ripetti. Its director was Ettore Ferrari, a prominent sculptor who had populated much of Italy with monumental equestrian statues of 19th-century heroes. The school played a significant part in determining issues of artistic policy in Rome, supervising archaeological excavations and advising on the restoration of ancient monuments. It offered courses in painting, sculpture, life drawing and architecture.

Iofan’s earlier studies in Odessa allowed him to move straight into the third year of the Istituto’s architecture course. He earned his diploma in 1916 with a final-year project that took the form of a ‘Palace of Peace’, an isolated and monumental war memorial. The qualification entitled Iofan to call himself a professor of architectural *disegno*: drawing or design. At the same time he took classes at Rome’s higher school of engineering, now part of the Sapienza University, to fill the gaps in his technical understanding of building not covered by the fine-art orientation of the Istituto; he graduated in 1919.

Some of Rome’s most prominent architects taught at the Istituto. Chief among them was Manfredo Manfredi, who, along with Pio Piacentini and Gaetano Koch, had worked on the completion of Rome’s monument to Victor Emmanuel II and Italian reunification. The monument had an overblown scale, some would even say an ungainliness, that may have influenced Iofan’s later Palace of the Soviets. It was built to impress, with its outsize paraphrase of the altar of Pergamon and crescendo of Corinthian

columns. But it was the message the landmark carried, beyond its specific architectural details, that gave Iofan his most important lesson: it bellowed a deafening (if implausible) claim to the heavens that the new kingdom of Italy had a destiny ahead of it equal to the glory of the Roman empire. Work began in 1885 and was not fully completed until the mid-1920s – long after the original architect, Giuseppe Sacconi, had died and had been succeeded by Manfredi. Mocked in Italy as the ‘giant typewriter’, it has the impact of a manufactured landscape, as if a huge white marble mountaintop had been dropped into the historic heart of the city.



Iofan submitted his design for a memorial to the dead of the First World War for his diploma project as a student in Rome. The circular tower, positioned on a rectangular base, anticipated his work in Moscow.

By comparison with contemporary masterclasses on offer elsewhere – for instance, at the academy of fine art in Vienna – Iofan’s architectural education in Rome can only be described as conservative. It would not be long before Walter Gropius opened the Bauhaus in Weimar, a school that would quickly make both Vienna and Rome look outdated. Meanwhile, in Moscow and Petrograd, architectural education was about to take on even more radical new directions.

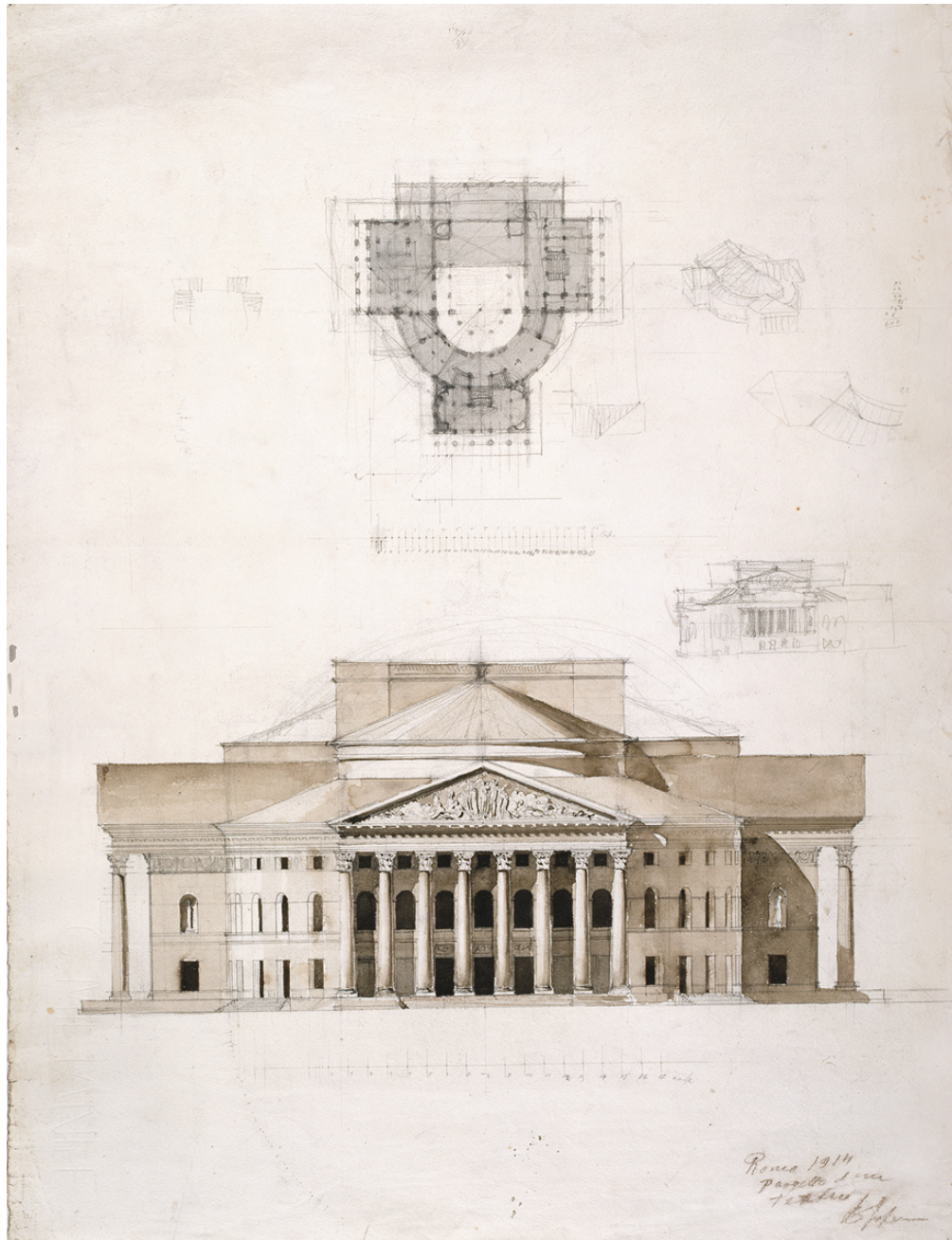
In Iofan’s view, however, the Istituto was overwhelmingly ‘modern’ in its outlook – by which he meant that it was teaching *fin-de-siècle* romantic eclecticism, much like the mishmash of styles he had observed while growing up in Odessa and learned to dismiss in St Petersburg.

Looking back on his time as a student in Italy in a 1935 article for *Arkhitectura SSSR (Architecture of the USSR)*, he recalled: ‘In those days, the prevalent style of the Istituto was the modern, but the professors did not interfere with my enthusiasm for classicism. On the contrary, they advised me on how to look at the monuments of Rome’s architects. The head of the department was Manfredi. He was a master with a high degree of culture and had a great knowledge. However, he remained faithful to the school of the 1880s which, to my point of view, was a disastrous period for architecture.’¹

The earliest surviving drawing from Iofan’s student days in Rome is a nostalgic design for a theatre dated 1914, characterized by a Palladian classicism typical of the Petrograd he had recently left. He used a single sheet of paper to lay out the design and, in characteristic Ecole des Beaux-Arts style, seems to have made a plan and used it to construct an elevation. He animated his pencil drawing with an ink wash in a style that would have been familiar 200 years earlier. There are marginal sketches that show his attempts to understand the volumes he had created. Iofan’s early graphic technique differs from the atmospheric charcoal renderings he would later use, but he was already a gifted draughtsman – as evidenced not only by this design but by his forensic drawings of Flaminio Ponzio’s mannerist 17th-century courtyard for the Palazzo Borghese, undertaken as an academic exercise in 1916.

Iofan was continually drawing in the many notebooks that he kept with him throughout his life. He was also an accomplished watercolourist, sketching and painting everywhere he went. He made

measured drawings of Trajan's Column in Rome. He drew the church of Santa Maria della Salute from the terrace of the Bauer Hotel in Venice; the Piazza Navona fountains of Rome; the ruins of the amphitheatre in Syracuse; the forum in Ostia. He sketched the steering wheel of his car – he had an Italian driving licence as early as 1920 – and superimposed the image onto a series of conceptual ideas for architectural projects.



A project for a theatre designed in his first year as a student in Rome, Iofan's Beaux-Arts composition reflects the Palladianism of the St Petersburg he had just left, but also references the façade of the Pantheon.

There was one particular aspect of the classical tradition that he took from his days in Rome and made distinctively his own: Ponzio's Borghese courtyard, which used outside human figures as an essential part of the composition, continued to influence him for much of his career. Ponzio's sculptures were 20 feet high. Iofan would introduce the same theme into his design for the Palace of the Soviets, which went through several incarnations, from the not much larger than life-size figure of Labour Liberated on its roof to a 325-foot-high statue of Lenin with an index finger 14 feet long. And his sketch

of a pair of Soviet workers, each almost 80 feet tall, was turned into the crowning feature of his design for the USSR pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition. What began as a celebration of the human figure, reflecting the kind of civilization that it represents, was eventually inflated into a threatening expression of the megalomania of totalitarianism.



Drawn as a student exercise in Rome, Iofan's carefully precise examination of Flaminio Ponzio's mannerist courtyard for the Palazzo Borghese portrays outside human figures, in this case 20 feet high, a motif that became a recurring theme in his architecture when he returned to the Soviet Union.

Like many architecture students, Iofan combined his studies with work for his professors. Contemporary practice suggests that he would not have been paid for his time as an assistant in their offices. Later, when he had opened his own studio, he continued to work for other architects and engineers – and, on occasion, building contractors – in order to supplement his income.

The contacts he made as a student gave him his first independent architectural commission: the Ambrogi tomb in Rome's Verano cemetery, last resting place of generations of distinguished Italians. Isaak Eigel, in his monograph on Iofan, writes: 'Iofan quickly established good relations with other students in his year. Professor Cellini, the teacher of perspective, had a high opinion of his son's classmate, whom his son had introduced to his family, and the parents of another of Iofan's classmates, Ambrogi, entrusted him with the job of designing their family chapel [...] built in 1918.'² Iofan used a pair of life-size *atlantes* to frame the entrance to the tomb, under a porch supported by two simple columns placed on either side. The effect was reminiscent of the entrance to his home in Odessa as well as Ponzio's Palazzo Borghese. His work at the cemetery stands alongside monuments designed by many of his teachers at the Regio Istituto, including Pio Piacentini and Ettore Ferrari.

Another of the teachers was Gustavo Giovannoni, who led a rebuilding effort following the catastrophic Marsica earthquake that struck central Italy in January 1915. The tremors left more than 30,000 people dead and flattened a group of small towns. Iofan travelled with a team of volunteers to Avezzano, one of the settlements almost wiped out by the earthquake, to help in its reconstruction. Giovannoni subsequently formulated a strategy for the sympathetic rebuilding of the town, taking account of the historical context to an extent that was unusual at the time. As a result of experiences like this, Iofan was beginning to understand the social role an architect could play in the community – an awakening that paved the way for his decision to join Italy's Communist Party in 1921.

Iofan took a practical view of the business of architecture and had a clear grasp of the strategies an architect needs to use to get work. He knew that he must make himself agreeable to potential clients and charm those who might steer projects in his direction. To judge by his later correspondence with the mayor's office in the town of Narni, where he was building an extension to the cemetery, he also knew how to insist on being paid on time.

Eigel names Iofan's first employer as Giuseppe Liberi, an engineer and architect from Pescara, who taught him the basics of professional practice and some of the technical subjects not covered at the academy. It seems more likely, however, that it was actually Antonino Liberi – brother-in-law to the poet and ultra-nationalist Gabriele d'Annunzio, and the only architect of that surname based in Pescara at that time. According to Eigel: 'Iofan was taught design and construction techniques by the engineer Liberi, who designed and built one of the first bridges in Europe to be made of reinforced concrete – at Pescara. A native of the Abruzzo mountains, Liberi treated his young assistant with great respect, without stifling his initiative or making him feel his superiority as a professional, listened patiently to Iofan's opinions, and was careful not to injure his self-esteem, even when Iofan made mistakes. The two became close friends.'³

Then came a year in the studio of Armando Brasini, an architect Iofan acknowledged as a significant influence: 'I worked as an assistant for the famous Armando Brasini, a monumentalist architect and a connoisseur of the Roman Baroque. Despite the divergence of our artistic tastes, he gave me the creative independence to design. Working with Brasini benefited me because he had a great imagination and scope in his architectural designs.'⁴ It was probably Iofan's recommendation that led, ten years later, to Brasini being one of the few architects paid to take part in an invited competition for the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow. He was certainly the only Italian in the group, which indicates the degree of Iofan's respect for his former employer. However, Brasini's closeness to Benito Mussolini and to Italy's fascist regime made it necessary for Iofan to downplay the significance of the connection and the degree to which it had influenced his own work.



Iofan's extension to the ancient cemetery in Narni, the town in Umbria where he lived with Olga Sasso-Ruffo, shows the theatrical influence of Armando Brasini, the best-known of the architects for whom he worked in Italy.

Brasini was an exotic figure. He was always immaculately dressed: sometimes in white flannel bags and a linen jacket, sometimes in the preposterous comic-opera cape and gold-braided uniform of an architect member of the fascist Reale Accademia d'Italia, and at least once as a sinister blackshirt in military tunic and peaked cap, photographed presenting his work to Mussolini in person. He had begun his architectural practice as a kind of florid decorator figure with a taste for bold, theatrical effects. He was responsible for the lobby of Rome's Hotel Excelsior and worked as an art director on early Italian cinema epics like *Quo Vadis*, to which he contributed the design for a delirious vision of Nero's palace.

At the time Iofan worked for him, however, Brasini had yet to secure a major building commission. His most conspicuous architectural project was the entrance pavilion for Rome's zoo, which had a whimsical elephant's head for a keystone; but there are plenty of drawings showing that he had turned Roman baroque into a kind of dark vision of expressionism. His design method was to begin by modelling clay to create a sculptural form suggesting the shape and character of a building, which he would then turn into an architectural plan. Iofan's training at the Istituto had taught him to do the opposite – to begin with the plan and allow that to dictate the form. Apparently influenced by his brother Dmitry, he introduced Brasini to a different technique: using charcoal sketches to explore form for the preliminary studies.

Brasini worked in a velvet-lined studio on the *piano nobile* of the 17th-century Palazzo Piceni on the via de Prefetti. One contemporary described it as having 'the aspect of a chapel, caught permanently in the midst of a solemn ceremony devoted to some non-specific religious cult'.⁵ It was rumoured in Rome that Brasini had a taste for the occult and that his designs were filled with hidden signs and meanings.

In 1921, Brasini was catapulted into the position of Italy's most prominent and politically well-connected architect when Giuseppe Volpi, governor of Tripolitania, appointed him to turn Tripoli into a capital city for the newly constituted colony of Libya. Brasini's work there bore a close resemblance to a monumental cinematic fantasy version of Byzantium he had created for the silent epic *Theodora*, released in the same year. It was just ten years since Italy had seized the territory from the crumbling

Ottoman Empire; Volpi embarked on an urgent campaign to import Italian colonists to settle land taken forcibly from Libyans, and to make good Italy's claim that it was simply returning to a territory it had governed 2,000 years earlier. Implicit in the task Brasini was set was for him to make Tripoli look like a city that had been in continuous Italian occupation since the time of the Caesars.

Gabriele d'Annunzio had adopted a similar strategy a year or two earlier in the contested city of Fiume – or Rijeka, as it was known to its Slav citizens – claimed by both Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. D'Annunzio had marched his ramshackle militia into the midst of this stand-off and set about adding ersatz Venetian iconography to all the civic buildings until, after somewhat rashly declaring war against Italy, he was expelled in late 1920.

Brasini designed the law courts for Tripoli in a multi-domed Byzantine, Moorish Saracenic style. He was also responsible for the city's savings bank, its coastal promenade and the remodelling of its historic landmarks to picturesque effect. His next colonial role was as official architect to the government of the Italian protectorate of Albania; he drew up a masterplan for its capital, Tirana, in 1925, and went on to plan the city of Durrës. He then moved on to Ethiopia and designed a cathedral for Addis Ababa, the city seized by Italy during its 1935 invasion.

Boris Iofan's nephew, Lev Dmitrievich Iofan (b. 1925) – the third member of the family to become an architect – described the debt his uncle owed to Brasini in terms that echo Isaak Eigel's monograph:

Designs were initially developed during the course of a series of discussions with employees at the office. There was much discussion of historical precedents that could have some kind of connection with the building that was being designed. They were looking for something similar that had been built in the Middle Ages, or the Renaissance, and for ways of inserting the building into the existing context and landscape. All this took place at a desk on which there were paper and pencils. Everyone would draw. And it was only after these preliminary sketches that the real work of designing the building began. Another practice which Brasini instilled in Iofan was that he would look for a prototype in the past, and send his assistant to look at and sketch it, so as to get his hand in, and absorb, as he used to say, 'the mood'.⁶

Brasini and Iofan pursued parallel careers. Both had come from families of limited means; when he was starting out, Brasini did not have the money to study architecture full-time. His formal education was limited to taking part-time courses at the Regio Istituto. Despite this modest beginning, Brasini was able to build a career with impressive speed. He designed the Italian national pavilion at the 1925 Exposition in Paris using concrete faced in marble, ceramic and gilded bricks. The centrepiece for the display inside was a portrait head of Mussolini cast in bronze, commissioned by the Duce's wealthy mistress, Margherita Sarfatti, from the sculptor Adolfo Wildt. In 1937, when Iofan's turn came to build a pavilion in Paris, he produced a much more dynamic design. Sergei Merkulov's larger-than-life, full-length sculpture of Stalin featured inside.

Both Brasini and Iofan chose to build their careers by attaching themselves to totalitarian regimes, and both were ultimately disappointed by their relationships with power. Iofan could not have known that the Soviet Union to which he returned with Aleksei Rykov as its titular leader would turn into the very different country it became under the absolute rule of Joseph Stalin. By the time it became clear what kind of leader Stalin was, it was too late for Iofan to turn back – and although Stalin was just as ready as Rykov had been to make use of Iofan's talent, he eventually lost interest in what would have been the greatest project of Iofan's career, the Palace of the Soviets.



Armando Brasini (second from left), in his fascist blackshirt uniform, presents his plans for Rome to Mussolini. Iofan had left his studio by the time Brasini planned colonial Tripoli, and Tirana. Brasini competed against his former employee in the Palace of the Soviets competition.

Similarly, Benito Mussolini, while he was ready to consider Brasini's ideas, never fully committed to them. Brasini drew up an elaborate (not to say monomaniacal) masterplan for the Italian capital that would have seen the destruction of much of the fabric of Rome, leaving the Pantheon, the Colosseum, the Vatican and a few other monuments as isolated landmarks caught in the midst of a new urban fabric. When the charm of Brasini's more nuanced architecture in his surviving buildings (such as the headquarters of the national social security system, the Convent of the Good Shepherd, and his own villa) was rediscovered in the 1980s by the postmodernists, they were disconcerted by the contrast of these imaginative works with his ruthless treatment of Rome. It was difficult to connect his readiness to erase so much Roman history with the inventiveness of his other projects.

Iofan and Brasini both designed multiple urban masterplans. Iofan worked fruitlessly on the reconstruction of three Soviet cities destroyed in the Second World War; Brasini tried to build new cities for the threadbare Italian empire in Albania, Libya and Ethiopia. Brasini's masterplans were notable for their elaborate, picturesque effects, but perhaps even more so for the tragicomic mismatch between their ambitious scale and the poverty that surrounded them.

Eventually, both men found themselves on the wrong side of history. In the democratic post-war Italy of the 1950s, Brasini's earlier closeness to the fascist regime – particularly the pictures of him dressed as a blackshirt, sharing a platform with Mussolini – blighted the final twenty years of his life. Iofan was fortunate enough to survive both the purges of the 1930s and the anti-Semitism of the late 1940s; but although there are no known photographs showing him in Stalin's presence, their close association was not forgotten. When Khrushchev took command he made it clear that he disapproved of his predecessor's architectural programmes just as much as his other excesses, and this disapproval cost Iofan the chance to build significant projects during his later life.

The revolution of 1917 galvanized Rome's Russian colony. Some exiles, like Iofan, had come to Italy to complete their education and become trapped there by the accidental restrictions of the war. Others were political refugees, on the run from imperial Russian prisons or from conscription in the

tsar's armies. Still others took no political position at all, but wanted to avoid being caught in the bloodshed of war and revolution. Each of these groups would come together over borscht and black bread in the dining room at the Gogol Library on the via delle Colonnelle to argue about the bitter factional politics of Petrograd and how to deal with the monstrous despotism of the tsar. After these sessions, Iofan would borrow Russian books from the library and go back to work.

Iofan's studio on the via Margutta, rented from his friend, the progressive engineer Giulio Barucci, became a centre for argumentative Russian exiles who had begun to think about how they could reshape their country, if and when they finally went home – and to discuss their plans with their radical Italian contemporaries. Fortunately for Iofan, he had the knack of making friends with revolutionaries just as easily as with Italian bourgeois liberal families or wealthy Russians.

After the overthrow of the tsar, Iofan took part in an exhibition staged at the Gogol Library that brought together 100 works by Russian exiles and their sympathizers, including Natalia Goncharova, the radical Moscow artist temporarily based in Rome with Serge Diaghilev's ballet company. The Italian scholar Antonella d'Amelia has identified the seven works that Iofan exhibited; they were all of architectural subjects that were clearly important sources for his own design work. Some showed classical sites: the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the Theatre of Marcellus. The rest were from the Renaissance: the fountains of the Villa Borghese, the Palazzo Massimo and the courtyard of the Palazzo Farnese. It's a mixture that reflects Iofan's view of the nature of classicism, as expressed in an article he wrote in 1935:

By studying the works of classical architecture – ancient and Renaissance – I have acquired the certainty that the style of each era is unrepeatable. Renaissance masters did not copy the ancient monuments, but after studying them carefully and lovingly, they created autonomous works, inspired by the new demands of life, new materials, new construction techniques. The masters of the Italian Renaissance took from antiquity some principles, harmony, the subtle taste for precise volumes, sharp, not overloaded with detail, and on this basis they built their style, which then itself became a model for the generations that succeeded them to study and learn from.⁷

Alongside five sketches at the exhibition, Iofan showed two of his engravings: an atmospheric rendering of the Pantheon, and another of the Borghese fountains. The image of the Pantheon is particularly striking and bears a strong resemblance to the designs that Iofan produced sixteen years later in Moscow for the massive circular auditorium of the Palace of the Soviets.

Iofan began to spend more and more time in the beautifully sited ancient Umbrian hill town of Narni, an hour's train ride north of Rome. Among its architectural attractions were its walled centre, its 14th-century palazzo and an impressive Roman bridge. Ever since the start of the century and the failed revolution of 1905, the town had been attracting Russian exiles in search of a congenial refuge from turmoil at home. Iofan met Olga Sasso-Ruffo, who lived in Narni, some time after he graduated in 1916. The attraction between them was mutual and swift despite their very different backgrounds. Soon, Iofan began renting a room in the villa that Olga was running as a boarding house; Italian police surveillance reports from 1919 dismissively referred to her as Iofan's 'companion'.

Olga was the strikingly beautiful daughter of a minor Italian duke with diplomatic status in Russia, who had died in England in 1911; her mother, Natalya Aleksandrovna Meshcherskaya, was a Russian princess. Technically Olga was a duchess, although she had no interest in using the title. Born in Kursk in 1883, she was eight years older than Iofan – and she had an estranged husband, Boris Ogarev, a soldier-turned-businessman whom she had left behind in Paris.

Olga and Ogarev had married in 1908. Their first child, also named Olga, was born in 1909 near Paris – a fact that the elder Olga later concealed, altering documents to suggest that her daughter's birth had taken place in Kursk so as to protect her from investigation by the secret police. A son, Boris, was born in 1911 in St Petersburg. It was a difficult birth, and he was a sickly child. Olga took both children to Italy to recuperate, without her straying husband.

In some ways Olga was a Russian counterpart to England's Jessica Mitford, the aristocrat whose membership of the Communist Party marked her out from a set of siblings that included some unrepentant fascists. Olga grew steadily more radical after she met Iofan and joined the Italian Communist Party along with him in 1921. Meanwhile, her sister Marusya married Pyotr Wrangel, a cousin of the leader of the White Russians during the civil war and former naval attaché at the Russian embassy in Rome; and her other sister, Elizaveta, married the tsar's nephew, Andrei Alexandrovich Romanov, in scandalous circumstances while already pregnant.



Olga Sasso-Ruffo, the half-Italian, half-Russian aristocrat whose sister married the tsar's nephew, with her first husband, Boris Ogarev. She was living in Narni when she met Iofan. They both joined the Communist Party and returned to the Soviet Union with her two children.

In April 1919, Elizaveta and other surviving members of the Russian imperial family were picked up by a British battleship sent to the Crimea to collect them as the Red Army closed in on the enclave. HMS *Marlborough* moored offshore, bathing Yalta in its searchlights to hold off a local Bolshevik uprising. The revolution was kept at bay long enough for the Royal Navy to embark an assortment of Romanovs led by the dowager empress (George V's aunt) along with their servants and tons of luggage. The imperial refugees bickered quietly among themselves about the allocation of cabins while fending off any White Russians without sufficient imperial connections to merit a berth, before sailing for Constantinople and Malta. Elizaveta eventually reached England by way of France. She died in 1940 during an air raid at Wilderness House, her mother-in-law's home in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace. Her photograph is in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery.

In 1905, another relative of Olga's had purchased a medieval castle overlooking Narni. Olga's mother bought a nearby property the following year. She adapted part of its sprawling complex of buildings – dating back to the 14th-century convent of Our Lady of Grace, and half-buried in a hillside on the edge of town – into a substantial twenty-two-room villa, even installing electricity. It was here that Olga settled with her children following the breakdown of her marriage; and when her mother died in 1918 she inherited a share of the property, known as Le Grazie. It was populated by a mix of

aristocratic exiles and bohemian Russian artists, including the painter and theatre designer Daniil Klavdijevich Stepanov as well as Olga's sister Marusya and her husband. The villa, built out of honey-coloured stone with its domed chapel topped by a lantern, was a picturesque accumulation of structures built at different times. Its gothic windows, framed by classical pilasters, revealed its shifting uses and the passing of the centuries.

While living in Narni Boris and Olga became friendly with a group of Italian radicals, some of whom would later be founding members of the Italian Communist Party. They were particularly close to Cesira Fiori, a writer, feminist and advocate of educational reform whose ideas influenced the school Olga established in the former convent complex. Fiori would not have shared Boris's admiration of Armando Brasini. Her campaigning against Italy's 1911 invasion of Libya marked her out as a dangerous subversive in the eyes of the fascist regime, and she would eventually be sentenced to prison and internal exile.

Clarenzo Menotti, another of Boris's friends in Rome, was a teacher who became a communist militant. He eventually moved to Moscow and continued his friendship with Boris and Olga in the Soviet Union, assuming the name Giovanni Verdi and becoming director of the Italian section of International Red Aid. He returned to Italy after the war and became a communist member of the Senate. Carlo Farini, a founder member of the Italian Communist Party, was another close friend. He moved to Moscow after the fascist seizure of power in Italy and volunteered for the International Brigade in 1937 to fight against Franco's rebels in Spain. He too returned to Italy after the fall of Mussolini and was elected as a deputy to the parliament in Rome, where he gained international attention in 1947 for starting a fistfight with right-wing parliamentarians in the chamber.

Olga's ambition was to create a progressive, co-educational boarding school – a plan that, given the radical circles in which she was moving, attracted the attention of the Italian police, who opened a file on her as a subversive. However, judging by the publicity material that she used to promote the venture, it was more like a business proposition than a nest of revolutionary agitation. 'In my Villa delle Grazie near Narni (Umbria), under my direction, will open this year a boarding school for young children between the ages of six and twelve,' it read. 'Situated on the via Flaminia, at 300 m above sea level, and an hour and a half by train from Rome.'⁸ In addition to meeting the requirements of the Italian government for elementary schools, the curriculum promised to address the moral and physical needs of pupils and to teach them English and French. 'At the request of the family, arrangements can also be made for children to receive religious instruction.'⁹ The fees included full board, but textbooks were extra.

Iofan supported Olga by converting part of the convent complex into accommodation for the school. He also became involved with a number of other social projects in Narni: the town wanted to use its local mineral spring as a source of income, and to create employment by building a spa and a water bottling plant. Iofan drew up designs for both of these, although they were never realized. His work on the town's monumental cemetery, however, survives. It comprises a sequence of geometric forms, a pyramid and a crescent-shaped colonnade suggestive of the extremist neoclassicism of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux – an impression underscored by the studiously archaic style of Iofan's drawings.

But in his brief account of his time in Italy, published many years later in Russia, it is not Narni that Iofan talks about at any length, but the work he did on a power station serving Rome: 'In 1921, I was deputy to the chief engineer during the construction of the hydro-electric station in the town of Tivoli. Construction was carried out by a communist cooperative. The main engineer was the communist (Ernesto) Ugolini, who was an important specialist in this field.'¹⁰

To focus on Narni would have been to draw attention to personal connections that could prove dangerous for him. Working on building a power station – and then taking political action to cut off the electricity supply to the city in order to sabotage a fascist rally in Rome – presented a much more acceptable version of events for the biography of a prominent Soviet architect.

Though not politically active before he left Russia, Iofan had started to work for the new Soviet regime as early as 1920. In that year he designed a small installation for Russian publishers at the

Florence Book Fair, an event he had helped to organize. The following year, he did the same for the Transcaucasian Republic's stand at a trade fair in Trieste. He talked later about have taken part in a delegation sent to Italy during the civil war in the hope of purchasing military aircraft. In fact, the engineering company Ansaldo sold thirty of its Ballila fighters not to the Kremlin, but to its White Russian enemies; but Fiat did establish trading links with the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

A violent period of social turbulence followed the end of the First World War in Italy. There were years of vicious street fighting – a campaign of terror and intimidation by gangs of blackshirts loyal to Mussolini – before the country succumbed to fascism in 1922. Perhaps by comparison with Russia, which suffered enormous numbers of military casualties followed by revolution, civil war and famine, Italy's problems seemed relatively benign; but life there was still unpredictable and insecure.

Both Iofan and Olga were threatened with deportation as political undesirables, and in May 1921 there was an attack on their home in Narni. A truckload of what the cool-headed Olga described as 'fascist desperados' had driven from Perugia, a distance of almost 50 miles. As she explained to one of her tenants in the aftermath, once they had finished smashing up the worker's club and the local office of the Socialist Party, the thugs got back in their truck and went looking for her villa. 'Three young fascists armed with rifles and axes broke down the gate, burst in and started to search the house. When they found copies of left-wing newspapers, they went crazy and started to smash windows and throw objects around.'¹¹

Iofan was away, but Olga and the children escaped and took refuge with friends in town. When she came back she found that the fascists had left, taking with them any easily portable objects of value. Things they could not carry – antique chairs, tables and a crystal candelabra – they smashed. She reported an engraved silver cigarette case, a woman's mackintosh and 3,500 lire in cash as stolen. Before the intruders left they harassed Olga's housekeeper, demanding to know the whereabouts of Iofan. She did not know where he was, so the fascists left, 'threatening to throw the architect out of a window if they could find him'.¹²

Despite being kept under surveillance by Italy's security services, Iofan was agile enough to survive the crisis. Funding for any building project was in short supply but even in these challenging economic and political circumstances, he was taking steps towards establishing his own architectural practice. Along with his engineer friend and landlord Giulio Barucci, he submitted an entry to a 1922 competition staged by the Italian Real Estate Institute for the design of affordable housing. Their project was published but disqualified from the competition on the grounds that it was 'in stark contravention of Roman building regulations'.¹³ They had more success with an apartment building they completed in Rome. The lessons Iofan learned from these two projects would be useful once he had returned to Moscow.

His circle of friends included many committed revolutionaries, but also some affluent members of the Italian bourgeoisie and aristocratic Russian émigrés of uncertain loyalty. After the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia some of these exiles in Italy became more organized, and the Italian police began to scrutinize their activities and their connections more intensely. The files of the Department of Public Safety in Rome show that they were tracking, among many other targets, Iofan's friendship with the journalist and political activist Aron Abramovich Vizner.

Vizner was born in Łódź in 1883, when the Polish city was still a part of the Russian empire. He travelled to Italy in 1913 for tuberculosis treatment and then, like Iofan, stayed on, living in the country for the next decade. The two became close, and Vizner would be an important ally in the Soviet hierarchy after both of them moved with their families to Moscow.

Vizner joined the Italian Socialist Party and supported himself by writing for a range of left-wing newspapers including *L'Avanti* and Antonio Gramsci's newspaper, *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Some of his work there was substantial enough for it to be mistakenly attributed to the more prominent Gramsci. After moving to Rome with his wife Francesca and their son Giovanni, Vizner was employed by Mikhail Vodovozov, who had charge of the Soviet Union's commercial affairs in Italy; and then, from 1922, directly by the newly arrived Soviet delegation to Rome, when he acquired diplomatic status.

Police records show Vizner's frequent contacts with Iofan in Rome. They note Vizner's presence at the founding conference of the Italian Communist Party in Livorno (where he went by the pseudonym 'Walter Franceso') and his close relationship with Gramsci. Iofan was warned by Giulio Barucci that he was also under surveillance as a result of his association with Vizner.

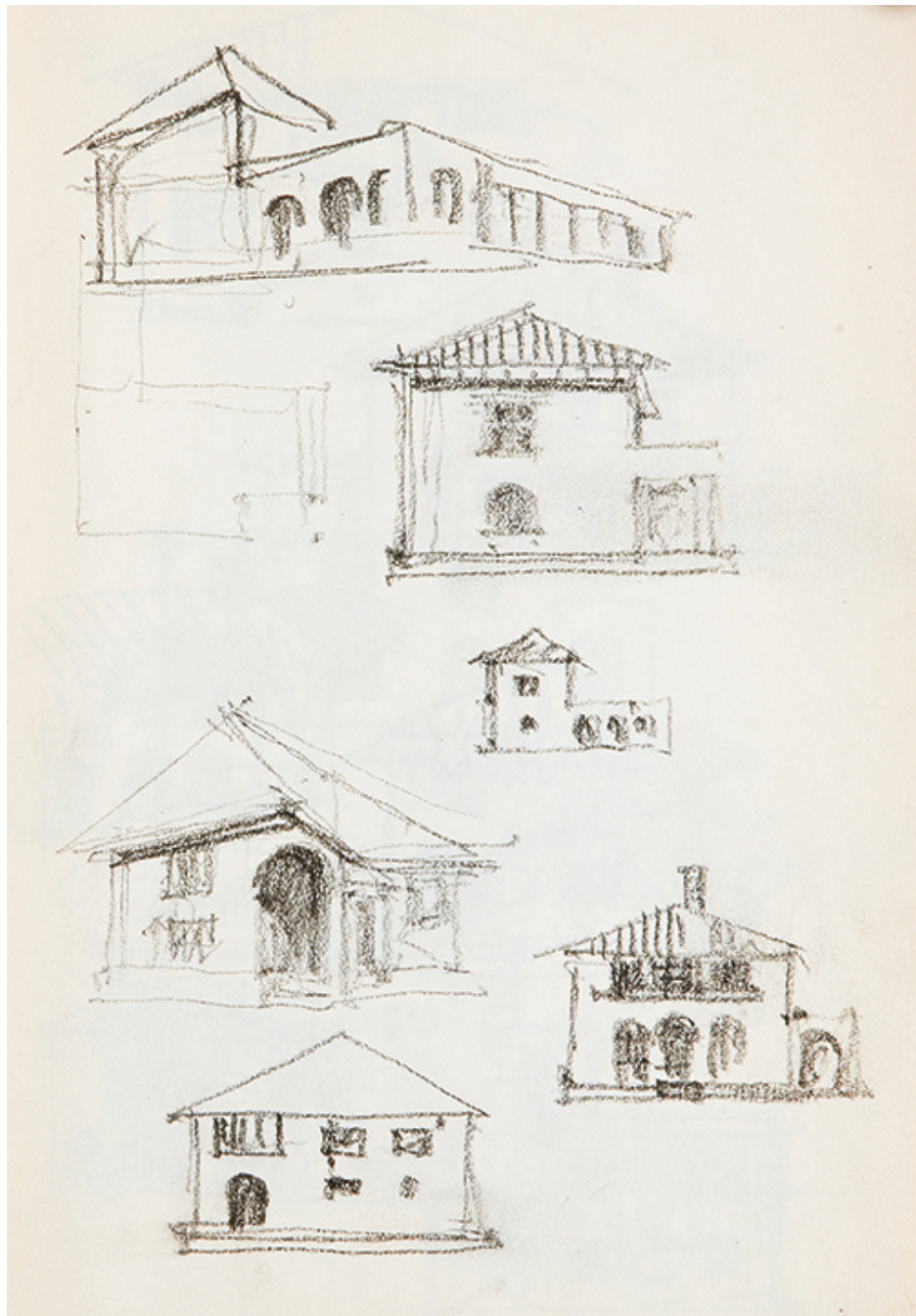
Working together, Iofan and Vizner played a significant part in furthering the Soviet Union's political and economic strategy in Italy. After winning the Russian civil war, in which almost all Allied powers had intervened on the side of anti-Bolshevik forces, the Soviet Union was ostracized by the rest of the world. Lenin had two simultaneous, contradictory objectives: to shore up Bolshevik claims to political legitimacy, he wanted to establish diplomatic relations with at least one significant European state. But he also aimed to spread the revolution and build an international movement of communist parties ready to accept Moscow's leadership. The country most likely to break ranks with the international community and recognize the Soviet Union (once Germany turned to democracy, after the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and the failure of the Spartacist uprising in Berlin) was Italy. It was also the country with the most powerful left-wing mass movement, and so the most susceptible to revolution.

To achieve diplomatic recognition meant Lenin and his henchmen had to present the Soviet Union as a respectable, reliable member of the international community, rather than as the murderer of the tsar and his family. But Lenin also wanted to turn Italian socialists who were equivocal about the revolution of 1917 into Bolsheviks and in doing so, undermine the Italian government. If he couldn't bend the existing Italian Socialist Party to his will he planned to fund the establishment of a Communist Party to supplant it – thereby radicalizing Italy's politics even as he tried to tempt its government into his orbit with trading links.

Lenin's chosen instrument in his move against the Italian socialists was the Comintern, a semi-clandestine organization set up in Moscow to export communism using all the methods the Bolsheviks had learned during their years in opposition in Russia. He sent Vladimir Degot, a Comintern agent who also went by the name of 'Diogotte', to make contact with sympathetic Italians in 1919. Degot had some common ground with Iofan: just two years older, he had also grown up in Odessa. During the pogrom of 1905, he had joined the self-defence unit protecting his Jewish neighbourhood from attack. Vizner and Iofan arranged a meeting between Degot and the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party at Olga's villa in Narni. Palmiro Togliatti and Antonio Gramsci, two of Europe's most prominent left-wing politicians and thinkers, were among them.

On the same visit, Degot took part in the Socialist Party congress in Bologna in October 1919. He was subsequently deported, having been caught by the police in Milan in possession of a false passport. After reporting back to Lenin on the mood of the Italian Socialists in the summer of 1920, he returned to Italy that autumn with instructions to do all that he could to bring Italian radicals into the Soviet camp – and the financial resources to make a success of his mission. He was busy at the Livorno Congress of 1921, where the Italian Communist Party was formed after a pro-Soviet faction split away from the main Socialist Party. Boris Iofan and Olga Sasso-Ruffo joined the new party immediately. After returning to Moscow Degot became deputy director of the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, the college from which Iofan received one of his earliest major commissions.

Even before Mussolini took power at the end of 1922, Italy's relations with the Soviet Union were complex. While Italy refused to recognize the new regime and had no official diplomatic relations with Moscow, Mussolini presented himself as a revolutionary and looked for potential allies with whom to work against the European democracies. Vatslav Vorovsky, the Soviet Union's first diplomat, based in Sweden after the end of the First World War, was named its ambassador to Rome and took up the role in March 1921 after a long argument about where the delegation would base itself. The Italian government refused to hand over the old imperial Russian embassy on the via Gaeta, which was still occupied by an active White Russian group – including Olga Sasso-Ruffo's brother-in-law, Pyotr Wrangel.



Iofan's exploration of the Mediterranean vernacular architecture that he saw in Italy was the starting-point for his first big project in the Soviet Union: a new town in the Donbass area of Ukraine, to house the workers at a new power station.

In the absence of an official embassy, Aron Vizner was instructed to secure hotel rooms as a base for the Russians. Vorovsky and his family, once they were finally allowed into Italy, would stay in the Hotel London for almost a year; the rest of the delegation took over the Albergo di Giardini, where they established an office and lived with their families. Vorovsky arrived in Rome in March 1921 only to be ambushed by an anti-communist demonstration at the station, and had his diplomatic bags impounded by police looking for evidence of subversive intent. His first task would be to negotiate diplomatic recognition for revolutionary Russia – the Soviet Union came into existence only in 1922.

Lenin, who by this time was seriously ill, wrote to Vorovsky in Rome demanding news of his activities.

I've not had any letters from you. Too bad. It wouldn't hurt to spend a few hours and write in detail at least once in two months. Do you help the communists? You have to do it. Absolutely, in an ultra-conspiratorial way. They are inexperienced and ham-fisted. It's necessary to teach, teach and teach them to work as Bolsheviks have worked, to teach with precisely written articles in the press. You have to find an Italian, and act through them. The situation is great, the workers are smart. But they can't beat that rogue Serrati [the Italian socialist leader]. For God's sake, teach them how to do it.¹⁴

After Mussolini took power the following year, a mob of armed blackshirts broke into the Soviet embassy on the Corso d'Italia. An Italian member of the embassy staff was shot and wounded during the invasion, and the ambassador's offices were damaged. Mussolini summoned Vorovsky to convey his regret at the incident and to raise the prospect of establishing an embassy that would reflect the dignity and status of a great power such as the Soviet Union. It was at this point that Iofan began to work on his design for a new embassy on a site overlooking the Tiber. Given his connections with Vizner (by this time a member of the civilian embassy staff) and the Soviet mission in Italy including the local representative of Soviet intelligence services, he was a natural choice for the job.

Through correspondence with his brother Dmitry, Iofan was well aware of the revolutionary developments taking place in Soviet architecture during the early 1920s. In 1925, the USSR would be represented at the Paris Exposition by Konstantin Melnikov's strikingly radical pavilion. But Iofan suggested a more reassuringly conventional image for the embassy building in Rome. His butterfly plan and mannered neo-baroque elevations turned away from constructivism and suprematism – it suggests the work of Brasini much more than it reflects revolutionary Russia, despite the Soviet iconography built into the classical details. Iofan created a colonnade to screen the main entrance and a circular plaza open to the public within it. Given what we now understand as the minimum standards of diplomatic security for great powers, this was highly impractical, but it did suggest an appealing accessibility. In any case, the project came to nothing – instead, the Soviet Union finally got the keys to the old embassy building on via Gaeta. Vorovsky was subsequently assassinated in Lausanne by a White Russian while attending an international conference on future relations with Turkey.

After a trip to Moscow in 1923, following which he went to see Iofan in Narni for one last visit, Vizner was expelled from Italy for breaching the terms of his diplomatic status by interfering in Italian politics. He finally returned to Russia at the end of 1923. He initially worked for the Glavlit – the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press: effectively, the censor's office – and then for International Red Aid, before moving to head Vyacheslav Molotov's private office for ten years. Later, in the period after Aleksei Rykov's demotion, Vizner would provide Iofan with an important connection to the office of a Politburo member with a leading role in construction projects.

In 1924, another Soviet visitor to Italy transformed the course of the rest of Iofan's life. After Lenin's death in January, Aleksei Rykov had become his notional successor. His position at the head of government was the result of political manoeuvring between Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev. Rykov lacked the charisma, the party allies or the ruthlessness to take Lenin's place in substance as well as in name. He was a figure from the right of the party whom Stalin was content to see take the nominal leadership while he plotted first with the right to destroy Leon Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev, and then turned on his former allies. Trotsky described Rykov as an able administrator and an effective politician, in spite of his stammer.

Rykov was appointed chairman of the Council of People's Commissars on 2 February 1924 – less than a week after Lenin's funeral, at which he served as a pallbearer. But his health was not robust; he had already experienced heart problems, spending several months in a Berlin clinic during the winter of 1921. He became ill again in 1924, and this time was sent to Italy to convalesce. Travelling under assumed names, he and his wife Nina spent almost four months in Italy. He returned to Moscow in July, when he was also featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, described as the President of the Union Council of People's Commissaries and Chairman of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic Cabinet. It is unlikely that he would have been able to travel to Italy without the government in Rome

being told of his presence – or without a bodyguard, after the murder of his ambassador in Switzerland. Certainly the Italian secret services opened a file to cover his visit.

The well-informed *Slavonic Review*, based at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, observed in its issue of March 1924 that ‘a man of uncertain health, and of no pronounced individuality, is now president of the Council of People’s Commissars’¹⁵ – in other words, prime minister of Soviet Russia. It added that ‘shortly after his appointment, Rykov received sick leave and is reported to have been sent to the Caucasus to recuperate. Many reports declare that he was subsequently seen in Berlin, in the company of people who are not usually associated with the Bolshevik government. That is as may be, but at any rate, he is not for the present exercising the duties of his office.’¹⁶

During their trip to Italy Aleksei and Nina Rykov quickly formed a personal and enduring friendship with Boris Iofan and Olga Sasso-Ruffo. The Rykovs’ daughter Natalia recalled how fond her parents were of their translator and guide, whom they jokingly called ‘Baroque’ Iofan. The convivial Rykov as the newly appointed head of state had a lot to say about the future prospects of a Soviet Union that was emerging from the austerity of war communism, and was prepared to invest in the New Economic Plan that would see it catch up with the most advanced industries of the West. He made it clear that if Iofan returned to the Soviet Union, he could count on playing a significant part in that transformation. The country urgently needed specialists who had proved their loyalty to the party in all fields, not least in architecture, and Iofan would be able to repay his debt to Dmitry by making him a collaborator on some significant projects. In Italy, on the other hand, Mussolini’s dictatorship had nothing to offer a member of the Communist Party. There had been no new commissions in Iofan’s studio for a year, and he now (although he and Olga were not yet married) had a family to support.

Within weeks of meeting Rykov, Iofan had decided to leave Italy and return to Russia. He sold his library and donated the proceeds to famine relief in the Volga region after Rykov, who had travelled there recently and been shocked by the horrifying evidence of starvation that he saw, alerted him to the scale of the suffering. Iofan then packed his suitcases and set off for Moscow.

Olga had more to think about. Moving to a Soviet Union that had slaughtered her sister’s relatives by marriage and pronounced an anathema on her entire class was a decision not to be taken lightly. Above all, she had to consider the impact such a move would have on her sixteen-year-old daughter and thirteen-year-old son. Nevertheless, after weighing it up, she put her affairs in order in Italy and followed Iofan with her children. (Natalia Rykova later suggested that the move may have taken as long as three years to complete, which if correct would suggest that Olga arrived in Moscow in 1927 when she could move into the newly completed housing scheme Iofan had designed on Rusakovskaya Street.)

An account of their return given by Olga’s great-granddaughter to a Russian tabloid suggests that it was a moment of high emotion, during which Olga actually kissed the sacred Russian soil. Whether or not this version of events is strictly accurate, it was certainly an irrevocable step.

Moscow

In the three years between the 1917 revolution and the height of the civil war in 1920, Moscow lost 690,000 people from a population of 1.7 million. It became a traumatized, hungry and half-derelict place of crumbling monuments and overcrowded slums. Its people, exhausted by extreme shortages in the shops, chronic power cuts and disease, barely survived on starvation rations. Lenin was not making an idle threat when he introduced his rationing system for civilians with the words: 'We will not feed those who do not work for Soviet enterprises.'



Rykov's promise to give him an important part in rebuilding the USSR persuaded Iofan to return to Moscow in 1924. The House on the Embankment complex was Iofan's most visible mark on the city.

Rationing in the Soviet Union was enforced through a system of intricately graded categories of deprivation. Those whom Lenin called 'workers by brain' qualified for the second-lowest number of

daily calories. They were positioned just behind the manual workers, and somewhat further down the scale from those categorized as doing heavy manual labour. Traders and the unemployed were the worst off: they were told to grow their own vegetables if they wanted to survive. People who were able to join the Red Army could qualify their dependants for better rations, while others returned to family smallholdings to produce whatever food they could.

So little coal was available during the winters that Muscovites burned anything they could find to keep warm, including books and furniture. When that supply ran out, they clandestinely pulled down empty buildings and salvaged the timber for fuel. Anyone doing this ran the risk of death by firing squad for the theft of what was, in 1918, designated a precious state-owned resource. Typhus was another significant threat; Moscow's hospitals were overwhelmed by it, with new cases running at 800 a day even as late as 1922.

When the worst was over, Lenin's self-justifying reference to the Bible – 'He who does not work shall not eat' – was painted around the rims of artist Mikhail Adamovich's fine china plates, designed to mark the end of rationing. The back of each plate bore a hammer and sickle emblem as well as the imperial cipher of Tsar Nicholas II. A stockpile of blank plates made at the imperial porcelain factory in Petrograd had stayed in store until after the revolution, and were decorated by the artists of the new order only in 1922. They were made as what was ostensibly part of a luxurious banqueting service under the creative leadership of Nikolai Suetin, the most gifted of Kazimir Malevich's students, who would later collaborate with Boris Iofan on exhibition designs for the Soviet pavilions in Paris and New York. Embellished with hyper-realist images of a pair of ration coupons dating from the previous year that, given the context, were as jarring as they were striking, they were sold to raise foreign currency.

As the civil war dwindled into low-intensity banditry, conditions in Moscow and Petrograd gradually improved. Lenin allowed private traders to return to the markets of both cities, making limited supplies of basic goods available again. Former residents such as the sculptor Vera Mukhina (another of Iofan's future collaborators) and her doctor husband returned to the city from rural Russia, where they had survived by bartering his skills, if not hers, for food. There were also many newcomers in the capital, desperate to escape from the famine areas where American, British and other overseas relief charities were doing all they could to keep victims alive.



The Soviet leadership in 1925. Aleksei Rykov walks behind Stalin, with Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev. Kamenev and Zinoviev were both shot in 1936. Stalin had Rykov, Iofan's first patron, killed the following year.

When Iofan returned to Russia, the no-longer-new regime was still squatting in the palaces, monasteries and hotels that had once belonged to the imperial system. The Bolshevik hierarchy had moved from Petrograd to Moscow when the latter city became the Soviet capital in 1918. Out of necessity most of them were put up in a range of hotels, precisely graded from luxury downwards according to status in the party hierarchy; only the inner circle lived inside the walls of the Kremlin itself. Property in Moscow was forcibly municipalized. Countless new committees and organizations, often known only by their acronyms, were established to reshape every aspect of this new world in a flood of bureaucratic procedures.

The Soviet Union's New Economic Policy, implemented from 1922, created an affluent bubble of so-called 'NEP men'. These were people who made their fortunes from a temporary return to the market economy, trading scarce commodities in the midst of almost universal poverty. It was a bubble accommodating enough to expand to include the party elite and the writers, dancers, actors and artists that they patronized. By the end of 1924, Moscow's population had climbed back to 1.5 million people,

although this was still 250,000 below its pre-war peak. It would go on growing thereafter, doubling by 1933. Housing conditions in the city were still bleak and many people lived without decency or dignity, six or seven to a room in run-down mansions from which the former owners had been evicted, or else in desperate suburban barracks with fifty bunks to a floor.

On his arrival in Moscow, Iofan was able to stay in his brother Dmitry's apartment, not far from the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. He applied for membership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and was accepted as a full member in 1926. Once Olga joined him and they were married, the sale of her property in Italy gave them access to foreign currency and the means to live comfortably in the bubble, inside which Moscow's elite was going through its own version of the Roaring Twenties. In his salacious memoir of ten years in Moscow, William Reswick, an American reporter and fixer who claimed to be close to Aleksei Rykov, describes frenetic gala nights at the Bolshoi, visiting musicians from Harlem, wild parties in restaurants, orgies in nightclubs and imported luxuries of every description.

It would be another decade before conditions improved for those outside the bubble. By then, according to the former Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer – a true believer in the revolution who had moved to Moscow in 1930 after being dismissed from his post in Germany for encouraging students to form a communist cell, and closed his eyes to anything that challenged his faith in the Soviet system – 'Life for the great mass of people, formerly so hard, was filled with gaiety. In cooperative shops the first models of Soviet fashion appeared. Jazz was played in clubs and restaurants. Dancing was revived. One saw the Tango, the Boston, and the Charleston. The bakeries sold twelve different kinds of bread without restriction. The best Stakhanovites [highly productive workers] were rewarded with Leicas and Fords, turned out by Soviet production. The first USSR-made electric lights and upholstered furniture became available.'¹

An unsympathetic view of Iofan's actions would be that he had left Russia early enough to avoid being drafted into the imperial army, and then stayed away long enough to miss the worst of the hunger and bloodshed that came with revolution and civil war. He only returned when the premier of the Soviet Union himself gave him the promise of work. In making the decision to relocate to Moscow, he ensured that his wife and stepchildren would never see her sisters or their families again – and if these lost relatives were ever spoken of, they would be labelled as class enemies. More charitably, it might simply be said that Iofan returned home to play his part in the building of a socialist future in which he sincerely believed.

In the midst of civil war, hyperinflation, a barter economy and desperate shortages of raw materials, Lenin's attempts to turn Moscow into the world capital of socialism through Nathan Altman and his agitprop art could be no more than symbolic. It was only after Lenin's death in 1924 that the resources became available to build more permanent revolutionary institutions, and that Iofan had a realistic chance of designing them.

The Soviet Union's most pressing immediate need was for housing. Radical architects saw the issue in ideological terms: designing mass housing was an opportunity to rebuild Moscow as a machine for turning its people into revolutionaries. They declared war on the bourgeois idea of the family by designing communal homes with nurseries and shared kitchens. But Iofan did not share this view, and his first two Soviet commissions were for apartment buildings that were anything but revolutionary. They were organized in low-rise three-storey blocks and built using conventional construction techniques and a familiar architectural language. He followed them with two more ambitious projects, both in Moscow. One was the newly established Karpov Institute of Physical Chemistry; the other, a design for the addition of an auditorium, classrooms and offices to the existing Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, originally created in the 19th century from an aristocratic estate at the edge of the city.

Within five years of setting up his practice in Moscow, Iofan had seven major buildings either finished or under way, a reflection of the plentiful opportunities offered to architects by Soviet reconstruction. Of all these projects, only one – the design of a new township for the Shterovskaya power plant in the Donbass, a coal-mining region of eastern Ukraine – was unambiguously built in the service of the proletariat. Shterovskaya housed the workforce for the first new thermal plant to open in

Ukraine since before the war, representing the start of Lenin's plan for electrification on a national scale. He had introduced his strategy at the party congress of 1920 with the ringing declaration that 'Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country' – at a time when Moscow was so short of generating capacity that even the hall in which he was speaking suffered a blackout.

The Shterovskaya township presented a very different side of Ukraine from Iofan's sophisticated home city of Odessa, more than 500 miles to the west. The remote site on which it was built was already scarred by spoil heaps, marking the traces of deep mines and the iron industry they had once supported. All it really had to recommend it was coal, a ready water supply and a railway line. Construction of the power plant, which was designed to burn anthracite, had begun in 1922; the first generator came on stream in 1926 and Iofan's little town, housing two thousand workers and their families, was completed by 1931. The homes were built as quickly as possible during a time of chronic materials shortages. As Hannes Meyer recalled of this period: 'Many essentials were lacking: steel for concrete reinforcements, plywood, cement, glass, hardware; nails and screws seemed worth their weight in gold.'² It was not a time to attempt anything radical in terms of layout, nor too technically ambitious in form or choice of materials.

Iofan's approach to the project, based on his work on low-cost housing in Rome, was pragmatism personified. He tried to give it the picturesque quality of an Italian village, designing two- and three-storey apartment buildings with pitched tiled roofs, embellished by balconies and loggias, arched windows and colonnades, all set on tree-lined streets. He arranged the buildings so as to suggest a community that had developed organically over the years, rather than being suddenly imposed on the landscape. Notably, each apartment had its own bathroom and kitchen, representing luxury for a working class newly graduated from semi-serfdom to the ranks of the industrial proletariat.

Shterovskaya was in the middle of a territory that would later be fought over by the Soviets and Italian Alpini mountain troop units, during the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. At that time the generators were dismantled by the invaders and numerous houses were left roofless and burned out. They were rebuilt after the war using equipment confiscated from Germany, but the power station was shut down in 1988. Its ruins are in what is now called the Lugansk People's Republic: a sliver of Ukraine seized by Russian-armed secessionists in 2014. All the remaining equipment was stolen and sold for scrap, and many of the homes are now in poor condition, re-roofed in corrugated iron rather than the tiles of Iofan's design.

Iofan did not spend much time in Shterovskaya while it was under construction. He was busy establishing himself in Moscow, a city he had barely known before the revolution, and learning how to work within the new system. His first five years there coincided with the most creative period in the Soviet Union's short history. While Stalin worked to make his hold on power absolute, there was still scope for an intellectual openness to experimentation in all the arts.

Following the lead of the Soviet artist polymaths El Lissitzky and Vladimir Tatlin, architects such as Moisei Ginzburg, the Vesnin brothers and Konstantin Melnikov were able to design projects as radical as anything Gropius or Le Corbusier had attempted in the West. Melnikov's pavilion for the Paris Exposition of 1925 showed the world that the Soviet Union had become an international leader of avant-garde culture. Ginzburg, Aleksandr Vesnin and the inspirational teacher Nikolai Ladovsky taught another generation of students at Moscow's Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios (known by its Russian acronym as the Vkhutemas), established in 1920 and regarded as the Soviet version of the Bauhaus. Soviet architects and city planners were ready to remake everything, from the individual home to the very idea of the city.

The English Garden City movement – an attempt to combine the benefits of urban and rural living in carefully designed, picturesque and self-sufficient communities – inspired the more conventional Soviet planners, who used it as a starting point for their vision of the decentralized post-capitalist city. It provided the basis for Iofan's work in the Donbass. At the same time, there was a drive for more radical exploration of new urban forms, notably El Lissitzky's 1925 proposed ring of so-called horizontal skyscrapers for Moscow. These towers were never built, but they were a precursor of the seven socialist

realist towers that Stalin began building almost twenty-five years later, which still define the skyline of central Moscow.

Even more radical were proposals for distributed settlements running along the length of road and rail lines across the country, which would have had the effect of abolishing traditional cities altogether. These were an amalgam of Bolshevik ideas about reducing the divide between the urban proletariat and rural peasantry, Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, and an unwitting anticipation of the endless freeway-generated sprawl of America.

There were only a handful of schools of architecture in the Soviet Union after the loss of Russia's Polish and Baltic provinces. New schools would be established, but in the meantime the country urgently needed to attract foreign specialists who could help to implement its building plans. At this period in his career, Le Corbusier saw the Soviet Union as a utopia, a society built on scientific principles and – he hoped – open to wholesale reconstruction under his guidance. In 1928, he won the competition to design the Tsentrosoyuz complex in Moscow, a headquarters for the country's massive cooperative movement. It would take five painfully slow years to build, a delay caused by shortages of even the most basic materials. These shortages, combined with the inability of unskilled Soviet building workers to realize Le Corbusier's challenging technical innovations, led to construction stopping altogether on more than one occasion. Undaunted, in 1930 Le Corbusier asserted:

Moscow is a *factory for making plans*, the Promised Land of technicians (without a Klondike). The country is being equipped!

A striking flood of plans: plans of factories, of dams, of mills, of dwellings, of entire cities. All of them under one sign: whatever brings progress. Architecture swells, moves, bestirs itself, and gives birth, breathed on and fertilized by those who know something, and those who make believe they do. An architect gets a commission: three, four, five, seven, are paid to compete against each other. In addition, for the big Ford automobile factory, an American architect specializing in industrial towns was called in; what he designed looks like a prison; it is nevertheless the model American company town. But the spirit of the times is not there; it seems anachronistic. Moscow laughs at it; it doesn't suit the new environment. This little incident is a touchstone; it gives the measure of the quality of Moscow planning.

Moscow is full of ideas in birth pangs, of ideas being elaborated, of juries, who examine. The five-year plan is a battery firing modern technology.³

Le Corbusier's collaborator Charlotte Perriand went to Moscow to work on the interiors of the Tsentrosoyuz and to see for herself what the Soviet Union had to offer. When she got back from her second trip in 1931, she was impressed enough to join the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires, a communist front organization set up by the Comintern.

Some architects came to Moscow from Germany to escape the rise of Hitler and the Great Depression. Ernst May – former chief architect of Frankfurt, where he had led a very successful civic housing programme – arrived in 1930 along with many of his staff. They were given the task of planning new industrial settlements across the country. May declared himself apolitical, suggesting that he was simply offering technical services for which he was paid in foreign currency. He and his team were granted access to special hard currency stores, restaurants and housing. In 1932, Bruno Taut moved to Moscow in similar circumstances. Neither arrangement was ultimately successful: May departed for Kenya when his contract expired, and Taut too eventually left the USSR.

Hannes Meyer, unsurprisingly, took a militantly ideological stance, saying: 'I beg our Russian comrades to regard us not as heartless specialists claiming all kinds of special privileges, but as fellow workers with comradely views ready to make a gift to socialism and the revolution of all our knowledge, all our strength, and all the experience that we have acquired in the art of building.'⁴ He was scathing about May and Taut: 'The Soviets treated these foreigners as precious precision instruments, wrapping them up in cotton wool, lodging them in the few modern houses, giving them the privilege of

almost luxurious food, and paying them very high salaries. These foreign experts brought with them from Europe and the United States the last word in super-mechanized and standardized building, and the collision between their ideas and the actual situation of the Soviet building industry at that time, was often cataclysmic.⁵ He was equally dismissive of Le Corbusier and what he called the ‘orgy of glass’ of the Tsentosoyuz – which he correctly saw as unbuildable in the form it was designed, given the Soviet Union’s limited resources at that time.

But even Meyer found it advisable to leave Moscow when all foreigners, including the most dedicated party members, began to come under suspicion from Stalin’s paranoid regime. He got out in 1936. Several of his former students and his assistant Margarete Mengel, with whom he had a child, were not so fortunate; they were either arrested, disappeared or killed. Mengel was shot dead in 1938 at the Butovo execution grounds in Moscow. Their son, just eleven years old at the time of her death, was sent to the camps and only managed to return to Germany as an old man. Despite this, Meyer continued – from a safe distance – to paint an enthusiastically positive picture of Soviet society and the role of the architect within it. While living in Mexico he wrote an extended account of the architectural profession in Moscow, which was published after Mengel’s murder.

In 1925, as a way of demonstrating that he had arrived in Moscow, Iofan entered the competition to design Lenin’s permanent mausoleum. Lenin’s death was treated as an epochal moment by the Soviet Communist Party – as cathartic, in its way, as the revolution itself. Moscow Radio called on the whole of the Soviet Union to stand up at the moment of the leader’s interment, and it took six hours for 500,000 mourners to march past his body. Aleksei Shchusev designed a small wooden crypt in Red Square, built overnight by a team of carpenters six days after Lenin’s death.

Shchusev went on to design a more substantial temporary replacement, with a glass casket by Konstantin Melnikov, before the final version that still stands beside the Kremlin wall opened on the anniversary of the October Revolution in 1930. This mausoleum, and even more the reviewing stand on top of it, would become an essential part of the choreography of the Soviet state. Exactly which members of the leadership appeared on that stand to take the salute at national events and rituals, and who was positioned next to whom, would serve as a precise reflection of the nuances of Soviet politics for the next six decades. Iofan had never been likely to beat Shchusev, but taking part in the competition had been a useful way of making himself visible to his peers and potential clients while he worked on his first Moscow project. The commission set up to oversee the building of the mausoleum was led by Stalin’s allies Kliment Voroshilov and Avel Yenukidze. Very soon both of them would be working with Iofan, on the House on the Embankment (then known as Government House) and the Palace of the Soviets.

Iofan’s first project in Moscow, on Rusakovskaya Street near Sokolniki Park, beyond the Kazan Station north-east of the Kremlin, was one of a number of new housing projects established in the 1920s on adjoining plots in that area. Melnikov’s famous workers’ club, with its cluster of cantilevered auditoria jutting into space, is close by. Officially, Iofan’s project was always described as ‘experimental housing for workers’, but in fact it had been initiated by Feliks Dzerzhinsky, a diligent and inventive practitioner of Red Terror and the notorious founder of the Soviet secret police (first known as the Cheka, then the OGPU and, after Dzerzhinsky’s leadership, the NKVD). The housing scheme was funded by the sale of valuables seized from the revolution’s class enemies.

It was probably Aleksei Rykov who introduced Iofan to Dzerzhinsky. With the entries for the mausoleum competition so recently on public display, Iofan could point to his submission – a suitably solemn and massive stone structure, topped by a slender tower – as an example of what he could do for the Soviet Union. On the strength of this evidence of his ideological soundness as well as his experience in Italy, Dzerzhinsky commissioned Iofan to design a development that would serve as a national model for social housing. Dzerzhinsky was both thrifty and carefully professional about the project. According to his official biographer: ‘Dzerzhinsky opposed unjustified expenditure in construction and advocated the use of cheaper materials, mechanization, and foreign innovations. He suggested that standard model

designs for housing be developed with due account for the price of materials, durability of houses, and their geographical location; he also insisted on the need for public control over housing construction.⁶

Like most housing cooperatives of the time, Rusakovskaya was built for the elite. In this case, it offered senior NKVD interior ministry police a place to live. It also provided homes for Iofan, his sisters Raisa and Anna and their respective families, along with a number of well-connected musicians and writers. Even the parents of Rykov's wife, Nina Marshak, lived there (a fact that may account for the persistent but unsubstantiated suggestions that Rykov's Jewish wife was a relative of Iofan's). For a time the NKVD employed Olga Iofan to censor letters, making use of her language skills, but she did not stay with them for long. She was criticized by her supervisor for her attitude, and her daughter later suggested that she found the organization's repressive culture hard to take. Instead she began to work in Iofan's studio as a researcher and translator. While she did not draw, Iofan always discussed design problems with her.

Iofan designed what Dzerzhinsky asked of him: the three buildings of the Rusakovskaya complex had traditional pitched roofs, smooth rendered plaster walls and a pleasant, human scale. There was no money for lifts, so their height was limited to three floors. Some of the blocks had shops and social amenities included at street level, forming the protective edge for a series of internal garden courtyards. The entrance to each staircase was marked by an arched recess at street level with a three-part Venetian window above it and a covered terrace above that. Iofan enlivened the otherwise undecorated façades with Juliet balconies. The flats were planned for individual families rather than designed for communal living, although there was a canteen and a kindergarten on the site – an arrangement that was described as 'transitional', in that they would provide the first step towards liberating society from the traditional family structure. Those who wished to do so could rely on the communal facilities, while those who preferred to live as a family unit could continue in that way. This was an issue that became a battle line dividing the party's utopian left wing from Stalin's followers.

Iofan worked on Rusakovskaya in partnership with his brother, Dmitry. Architects in the USSR had not yet become compulsory state employees, as they would some years later under the authority of Stalin's all-purpose enforcer Lazar Kaganovich. For now, the fact that Dmitry had a Russian diploma from the academy in St Petersburg and had already worked in the country enabled the two brothers to set up an office together while Boris was having his Italian qualifications translated into Russian (a necessary step before he could obtain a licence to practise). While Dmitry and Boris would work together on other projects in the future including Government House, Boris always took the leading role, moving away from shared creative authorship after Rusakovskaya was complete. He had built Rusakovskaya as part of his job as principal architect of Stroiomburo, the NKVD's housing arm, a newly established role that he held for two years until 1927. Dmitry was named as part of the design team on many of his brother's projects, but there are few examples of him working on a project without Boris (one of these was the 1932 competition for the Stalin stadium at Izmailovo, which he did not win).

William Reswick, in his memoir, recalls his own flat on Maly Palashovsky Pereulok in a development much like that of the NKVD on Rusakovskaya. It had, he says, been 'recently built by a cooperative of well-paid engineers. They were in need of foreign currency for the purchase of installations unobtainable in Russia. For this reason they had reserved two vacancies for foreigners.'⁷ Reswick put up three years' rent in advance, in US dollars. He threw a 1929 New Year's Eve party at the flat in honour of Avel Yenukidze of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, who was also a patron of the Bolshoi Ballet and the Moscow Art Theatre. In addition to all of that, Yenukidze was also Boris Iofan's client for Government House, the most luxurious housing scheme in the whole country, which was already taking shape.

Other guests at Reswick's party included the actress Olga Knipper, widow of Anton Chekhov; the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, also a member of the Palace of the Soviets advisory group; Vasily Tikhomirov from the Bolshoi Ballet; and Lev Karakhan, future Soviet ambassador to China. It was an elite affair, although the bubble of privilege in which it took place would not last forever; Yenukidze, Meyerhold and Karakhan all lost their lives in Stalin's purges.

The Iofans were not present at that particular gathering, but their life at Rusakovskaya Street wouldn't have been so different. At the end of the 1920s it was an attractive place to live. While many nearby constructivist housing projects have since been demolished, Iofan's block still stands today and has been carefully modernized. The contrast between its design and that of Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin apartment complex, on which building started in 1928, could not be more striking. Iofan's design allows for slightly more spacious interiors, but makes no visual claim to represent a new architectural order; Ginzburg, on the other hand, created a high-density plan for the Narkomfin Building by going up to seven floors and using an ingenious split-level cross-section for the smaller apartments. It was at the forefront of modern movement architecture.



Iofan's modernist Barvikha sanatorium, built for the exclusive use of senior Communist Party members. Iofan used a circular floor plan for the hospital rooms, expressed on the façade by the bay windows resembling bottles in a rack.

If Ginzburg's Narkomfin Building has much in common with the direction Le Corbusier would take, Iofan's Barvikha suggests a more Germanic form of modernism, closer to the work of Erich Mendelsohn, who designed Leningrad's Red Banner textile mills in 1926. Built for the exclusive use of the most senior members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Barvikha was officially described as a sanatorium or hospital; but with its carefully guarded restaurants, reading room, fountains, tennis court and swimming pool, it would be more accurate to call it a resort. Its concrete and steel structure, purist geometry and extensive use of glass are closer to the mainstream of European modernism than to Iofan's better-known work for Stalin. Its medical suites, which looked more like discreet leather-and-oak-lined hotel rooms in Mayfair than hospital wards, made Barvikha a place with a special attraction for the Russian elite and their allies, a role it still occupies today. It was here that Yuri Gagarin came to recuperate after his first excursion into Earth's orbit; Politburo members had their villas in the neighbourhood; and Slobodan Milošević's family sheltered in the area after the Serbian dictator went on trial in The Hague.

When Frank Lloyd Wright visited Moscow in 1937, Iofan took him to see Barvikha, driving out in his Buick with the top down. Wright called it a 'very well-designed, very well-built structure....An

ingenious arrangement of balconies and rooms gives outdoor enjoyment to indoor comfort...here is a performance that could not be, has not been excelled anywhere.’⁸ But he clearly did not understand Barvikha’s place in the Soviet social hierarchy, asserting that: ‘Any Soviet citizen needing attention and care may go there to luxury seen only on our trans-Atlantic liners.’⁹

A striking feature of Barvikha’s original design was the circular floor plan of its bedrooms, later adapted in a more conventional remodelling carried out by Iofan in 1935. They were expressed on the façade of the building by curved bay windows, like bottles in a wine rack. Each had access to a balcony set into an angled window wall, with views over extensive landscaped grounds. Iofan had used similar angled glazing before, for his work at the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, where his ex-Comintern contact Vladimir Degot had become deputy director. Iofan’s buildings there, designed in 1926, are a radical contrast to the original grand neo-baroque house that had served as the academy’s main building since 1865. Using an idiom suggestive of the rationalism that was just beginning to appear in designs by Giuseppe Terragni and Giuseppe Pagano in Italy, Iofan planned the complex with a ‘spine’ formed of rectilinear buildings, punctuated at intervals by glazed stair towers and a semicircular block of lecture theatres. He used a regular grid of generously proportioned square windows for the façades, making them as much glass as red brick (they have subsequently been given a layer of classical decorative ornament).

The Karpov Institute of Physical Chemistry laboratories were built in the grounds of a Moscow mansion, once owned by a German family, that had been set on fire by a nationalist mob at the start of the First World War. Here a pair of crescent-shaped wings project symmetrically from either side of a central domed drum, suggesting an abstracted classicism that prefigures Iofan’s work on Government House and the Palace of the Soviets. Under the dome is a circular lecture theatre.



Built in the grounds of a palatial classical mansion, the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, designed in 1926, reflects the rationalist architecture taking shape in Italy at the same time.



The style of the Agricultural Academy was in sharp contrast to Iofan's continuing fascination with vernacular architecture, as revealed in his sketchbook from the same period.

Each of Iofan's four projects from this period – the housing at Rusakovskaya, the Barvikha sanatorium, the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy and the Karpov Institute of Physical Chemistry – shows a different architectural approach, almost as if he was exploring all the options for what the state architecture of the Soviet Union could be: from traditional to constructivist, from modernist to neoclassical. He was far from the only Soviet architect ready to adopt a variety of architectural languages. Before the revolution, the three Vesnin brothers had been classicists; after 1917, Aleksandr Vesnin in particular designed some of the most outstanding constructivist projects, such as the unbuilt Palace of Labour, and retained his robust intellectual and creative principles for the rest of his career. Aleksei Shchusev was the most promiscuous of all, ready to try anything; Karo Alabyan the most politically militant. The Palladians, Ivan Zholtovsky and Ivan Fomin, were perhaps the most consistent in maintaining a commitment to a formal architectural language.

As his work at Barvikha and the Timiryazev Academy shows, Iofan was just as capable of working in a modernist idiom as he was of evoking the Mediterranean vernacular. He would soon go on to develop his own architectural language – essentially neoclassicism tinged with appreciation for the American Rockefeller Center skyscraper style – which came to be regarded as the model for social realist architecture in the Stalin era.

Thanks to his friendship with Aleksei Rykov, Iofan had by this time secured the job of designing Government House (which later became known as the House on the Embankment) to provide permanent homes for the leadership. Rykov appointed Avel Yenukidze – who, as secretary of the Central Executive Committee, was responsible among other things for the administration of the Kremlin – to lead the building process.

Natalia Rykova remembered the Iofans visiting her parents in their apartment at the Kremlin and spending weekends at their dacha in the country; Olga would cook them pasta and bring her Italian coffee pot to make espresso. On one of these visits, Iofan brought out a roll of drawings and spread them out to show his friend what he had in mind for the project.

The original plan was for as many as three separate groups of buildings; a site near Kudrinskaya Square was selected for the first group. Yenukidze allocated a budget of three million roubles and gave instructions to build 200 apartments with three- and five-room layouts. Iofan's first sketches suggested that the buildings would rise to seven floors and include shops at ground level. The development would be faced in brick with a reinforced concrete structure. It was scheduled for completion before the end of the following year.

However, the commission quickly changed its mind, abandoned the brief and started again. This time Iofan was asked to increase the number of apartments to 400 and to build them on a site closer to the Kremlin. Almost immediately afterwards, the site they had in mind was allocated instead to the new Lenin Library and they had to look elsewhere. Yenukidze and Iofan finally settled on a plot on Balchug Island on the banks of the Moskva River, connected to the Kremlin by the Great Stone Bridge. It had previously been occupied by a 19th-century bonded warehouse known as Wine and Salt Court and a district courthouse, and it was surrounded by a motley collection of buildings of various ages from 17th-century churches to a modern chocolate factory. The warehouse, the court and a cluster of other buildings were demolished. Yenukidze increased the number of flats for a second time, raising it to 505. Some four-room apartments were added to the mix, and the larger five-room apartments were replanned to include an additional room for a servant.

In order to accommodate all this, Iofan had to make the height of some of the buildings well above the blanket Moscow limit of six floors for residential buildings. The Regional Engineering Bureau authorized the construction of a building of up to ten floors, but that still wasn't enough – Iofan needed eleven. He was waved through; the resulting building, if you count the rooftop structures, actually rises to twelve floors in some places. Iofan needed a relaxation of the rules for the interior layout, too – building high meant that every lift core would have to serve twenty apartments, not the maximum of twelve specified by the rules.

The construction process turned out to be unexpectedly complicated. Special equipment had to be imported and the muddy site, fully living up to its nickname of 'the swamp', demanded the sinking of a dense grid of piled foundations to a depth of approximately 50 feet. To protect the basements from river flooding, a new embankment was created. By the time construction started, the budget had grown to fourteen million roubles, and it eventually reached double that amount; Aleksei Rykov had to plug the gap by using his authority as premier to order the state bank to make up the shortfall. No wonder that the theatre in the complex was named in his honour (or at least, it was until Stalin orchestrated his fall from power and renamed it the Kalinin Club).

For a time, it appeared that costs might climb even higher. Iofan was simultaneously working on a plan for a 1,000-bed hotel on an adjacent site to form part of the complex, though it never materialized; and he also sought permission to demolish the nearby 17th-century church of St Nicholas the Miracle Worker in order to expand the site sufficiently to include a nursery school. The State Historical Preservation Workshop, which was housed inside the church, fought hard to protect it from destruction, but the Moscow Soviet rejected their arguments and ordered them out. In the end, however, the church was saved by the cost overruns on the rest of the project. The provision of the school was postponed, to be included in a second phase that never came.



The House on the Embankment has a symmetrical river façade, marking the entrance to the theatre and the most sought-after apartments.

Hannes Meyer, in his starstruck account of Soviet architectural practice, states that the architect's 'work is not subject to the control of ground rent nor is it fettered by the private ownership of land. In his projects the architect uses the land with complete liberty, even modifying boundaries if necessary. The density of people in a block of houses or the number of floors in an apartment house is based only on social, biological and aesthetic needs and economic considerations.'¹⁰

Even before the delays and the final cost overruns, *Moskovskoye stroitelstvo* (*Moscow Construction*) magazine published a scathing attack on Iofan in 1928, pointing out that there had been no architectural competition for Government House. This, surprisingly, had little effect on his reputation, even though it was true that Aleksei Rykov had awarded the project to his friend on the basis of nothing more rigorous than Iofan laying out his first sketches on the floor of the premier's home late in 1926.

'Contrary to the law, the design was produced without an open competition, in a non-transparent and unacceptable way,' the magazine charged, pointing out that despite its prominent location in the middle of Moscow, no images of the House were published until construction was well under way. 'Was the completed design discussed by the wider public? Unfortunately it was not. Was the design published anywhere? No, it was not. The editors tried to obtain a copy for publication, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. Someone, somewhere, somehow, produced and approved a fourteen-million-rouble project that the Soviet public knows nothing about.'¹¹ Iofan responded by telling the magazine that the design had been considered by fourteen professional experts and approved by a special government commission as well as the Regional Engineering Bureau. He agreed to let the design be published – and received a partial apology – but he did not address the question of how he had secured the job.

The House on the Embankment is an urban complex made up of seven distinct elements grouped around three interconnected courtyards that, in theory, were accessible to the public. However, the round-the-clock militia guards who stood at every entrance ensured that this was not a piece of urban fabric the public would make use of. It was like a walled enclave in the middle of Moscow – the Soviet version of Beijing's Imperial City.

Aside from the residential blocks, the complex houses a huge theatre, a cinema (now closed), a department store and a restaurant (remodelled). There are 505 flats which, in 1932, were home to 2,475 people – all built on one of Moscow's most prominent sites. It is without question the most impressive of Iofan's realized works, and can be seen as a forerunner of the megastructure concept that became popular in the 1960s. Almost everything the tenants could wish for was on hand: a clinic, library, exercise facilities, pistol shooting range, a restaurant open only to them. The apartments had constant hot water and heating as well as telephones, and a stock of specially designed furniture was available for those tenants who needed it.



The rest of the complex was organized around three courtyards, and included a cinema, a department store and restaurant.

While the project represented a vision of suave, beautifully organized metropolitan urban life, the process of building it was a chaotic and controversial one that Iofan was fortunate to survive. As well as being ruinously expensive and running years behind schedule, it was dangerously mismanaged at site level. Some party loyalists complained that the money being squandered on it could have been better spent on investing in the Soviet economy; but they were firmly told that with the foundations already in place, there could be no turning back.

It was not solely Iofan's fault that the scheme was so late in its completion and so wildly over budget. He had a committee as a client, one that frequently changed its mind with little thought or care

for the consequences. It was ready to specify oak parquet floors, not pine; marble steps, not concrete; and generous 11.5-foot ceilings.

But the contract was also conspicuously mishandled. *The House of Government*, historian Yuri Slezkine's masterly account of life in the building, tells a startling history of a construction site beset by disorganization, drunkenness and general incompetence, not to mention the near-constant presence of on-site sex workers and a critical shortage of skilled and disciplined staff. In the course of the project, no fewer than three separate party inquiries were carried out into how things had gone so badly wrong.

The first of these investigations identified 'a series of outrages, gross mismanagement and violations of labour discipline'.¹² A wave of sackings and demotions followed: the site manager and his deputy were dismissed for incompetence, and the leader of the on-site party cell was fired for 'not being firm enough in fighting degeneracy'.¹³ Vasily Mikhailov, head of the Moscow Trade Union Council, was let go for 'vacillations and conciliatory tendencies' and exiled to the Dnieper hydro-electric project.¹⁴ The deputy head of construction was found guilty of concealing the extent of the problems. The new head of construction was cautioned to learn from the mistakes of his predecessors and hire only the most reliable and competent workers. He must at all costs, he was told, ensure that 'undisciplined elements' were kept off the site in future.¹⁵

Iofan himself was reprimanded for leaving the country at the height of the construction work, ostensibly to take a business trip to Italy. In fact, it was likely connected with moving Olga and her family to Moscow. He was also charged with failing to make it clear to the on-site workforce of 600 people that their union had agreed to a policy obliging them to donate two hours' unpaid overtime for every working day.

Incompetence and delays could be covered up, but it was impossible to ignore the fire that in 1930 swept through the still-incomplete eleven-storey tower block on the riverfront nearest the Great Stone Bridge. The flames leaping over the roofline were clearly visible from the Kremlin, and nearly the entire leadership of the country came out to see for themselves what was going on. Only Stalin himself was missing.

Gospromstroï, the state construction trust building the project, dispatched its own fire brigade, but serious damage was done before they succeeded in controlling the blaze. Somebody had to be held responsible, and that unfortunate person was Nikolai Tuzhilkin, the twenty-four-year-old acting fire chief. He was arrested, accused of sabotage, put on trial, found guilty and executed, all in the space of just three weeks. Tuzhilkin's death was followed by a sustained but unsuccessful attempt to complete the already delayed project on a speeded-up schedule. From April 1930, round-the-clock shift-working was introduced and 300 extra construction workers were drafted in from other Moscow sites. In September, a further 850 skilled craftsmen were brought on in a final attempt to get the building finished before the end of the year.

The first residents of Government House, including the Iofans and Boris's sister Anna, were finally able to move into their new apartments in 1931. The following year, Iofan's stepdaughter Olga gave birth to a son, Sergei, at the House; meanwhile her younger brother, Boris Ogarev, was studying electrical engineering at a technical college. But the building in which they all lived was still unfinished. In the end, completion was piecemeal, block by block over the following two years. A final official review of the project concluded that it would be too expensive to build any more housing for party officials along such lines as had originally been planned.

By this point, Iofan was already in charge of building the Palace of the Soviets. The importance of personal connections and loyalties to official decision-making processes in Moscow was evident, in that he won that job despite all the problems associated with the Government House project – many of which happened to be aired in public at the precise time that key decisions were being taken about who would design the Palace.

In October 1931, while they were planning the structure that would become Radio City at Rockefeller Center in New York, the American architect Wallace Harrison and theatre impresario Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel had visited Moscow. They spent five days looking at monumental Soviet

architecture and met the Directorate of the Construction of the Palace of the Soviets; they saw Iofan's preliminary studies for the palace and visited the still incomplete Government House, with its spectacular cinema and theatre auditoria. When Iofan visited New York in 1934, he singled out Rockefeller Center and the Radio City auditorium for special study.

While they were in Moscow, Harrison and Rothafel also talked to Konstantin Melnikov. Rothafel was much taken by his ideas on the mood-enhancing possibilities of air conditioning. Harrison would later make use of what he saw in Moscow for his Trylon and Perisphere, the most conspicuous landmark of the 1939 New York World's Fair. It was inspired by the drawings of constructivist architect Yakov Chernikov blended with Ivan Leonidov's Lenin Institute student project, portraying monumental spheres and cable-supported masts.

The completion of Government House marked Iofan's emergence as a major figure in Soviet architecture. He had designed the most conspicuous new building in Moscow and many of the city's most important and influential people, from Nikita Khrushchev to Marshal Zhukov, lived inside it. Architecturally, the complex is undeniably impressive, if more sombre than he originally intended; the red Karelian stone he had planned to use as cladding was expensive, and even Aleksei Rykov could not authorize yet more cost overruns to pay for it. Instead, the building was finished with a cinder-grey render. The architectural historian Selim Khan-Magomedov believes that when granite was ruled out, Iofan's preferred alternative was yellow sand-coloured render. He was talked out of it by his brother, who was concerned at the effect soot from the chimneys of a nearby power station would have as it settled unevenly on the building. They decided that a pale-coloured building, staining unevenly, would be a less attractive option than the uniform dark grey finish that the building had for many years.

By this time, 'constructivism' was a somewhat loosely defined term with little more specific meaning than modernism. Nevertheless, the House on the Embankment is often described as constructivist – mainly because of the external expression of its internal structure, which provides a kind of frame for the purist geometry of the forms it contains. Seen from the river, its façade has a classical symmetry. The long frontage has a six-storey main block at its centre, with taller towers at each end. Six massive square columns, each four storeys high, protrude forward from the middle of the block to mark the entrance to the theatre. This group of columns is balanced at either side by twin openings cut into the façade three storeys high, each with two flush columns that frame the entrances to the first of three interlocked courtyards.

Furthest from the river, at the narrow end of the wedge-shaped site, is the cinema, built as a separate element and clearly identifiable by its distinctive barrel roof. It was called the *Udarnik* – Russian for 'shock worker', a tribute to the name given by the Communist Party to those workers awarded special recognition for making an outstanding contribution to the state. Its roof was originally designed to be partially retractable for starlit summer night screenings, but this feature was quickly abandoned. While the sombre colour and daunting scale of the House complex were intimidating, Iofan was able to bring a more dynamic spatial quality to the theatre and cinema interiors.



The American team building Radio City Music Hall at Rockefeller Center came to Moscow, met Iofan and saw the dramatic interiors of the cinema and the theatre (above) at the House on the Embankment as they neared completion.

The Iofans' top-floor apartment became a salon at which Moscow's great and good gathered. It was where Iofan introduced the leading physicist Pyotr Kapitsa – who had recently been forced to return to the Soviet Union from Britain, along with his wife Anna – to Solomon Mikhoels, after a performance at Mikhoels's theatre. This introduction would later lead to Kapitsa joining the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, chaired by Mikhoels, when it was established in 1941.

Iofan had become a ubiquitous presence in Moscow. His official studio was a suite of rooms within a handsome 18th-century mansion beside the Kremlin walls, at Kremlianskaya 2 (the not-always-reliable Frank Lloyd Wright believed the property had accommodated Napoleon when he seized Moscow in 1812). Iofan was prospering even without the support of Aleksei Rykov, whose influence was already waning; Stalin would put Rykov on trial in 1937 and execute him in 1938. Their close friendship was a potential liability for Iofan but evidently did not damage him enough for the leader to have him removed. Indeed, it seemed that Stalin was content to keep making use of Iofan's skills, personally making him responsible not only for the Soviet pavilions at the Paris and New York World's Fairs, but for the Palace of the Soviets – the summation of the Stalin era's architectural impact on Moscow itself.

Stalin's assumption of absolute power had significant consequences for all architects in the Soviet Union. He was determined to remake Moscow in his own image, just as he was determined to bring

architects under the control of the state in order to ensure that his buildings for Moscow met his requirements. He worked through Lazar Kaganovich, who had been one of his key allies in Ukraine, to implement his architectural policies. Kaganovich was brought to the capital in 1928, where he initially took on the role of first secretary of the Moscow regional party committee and later Moscow party secretary, functioning as the city's mayor for five years. Together, he and Stalin began to think about a comprehensive plan for the rebuilding of Moscow, one that would accommodate population growth of up to five million.

Kaganovich went on a construction spree, with a particular focus on digging a deep underground metro system. Every leading architectural academician was allocated the design of a station along with a generous budget to celebrate the new order that Moscow's metro was intended to represent. By March 1933, a fifty-mile system had been approved; Iofan was assigned to design a station on Spartakovskaya Street in 1938. Now known as Baumanskaya, it became one of the busiest on the system and has recently reopened after a thorough restoration.

Kaganovich also planned for an expanded electric trolley bus network, a district heating system, improved street lighting, new sewers, better roads and new parks and factory canteens. His list of projects, closely supervised by Stalin, included the building of the Moskva Hotel, started in 1932, and headquarters buildings for three government departments.

Thus far, it was a conventional enough shopping list for any government. Less usual was the Moscow–Volga Canal project, a massive undertaking that took on a horrifyingly pharaonic scale. It was built using the forced labour of 196,000 prisoners from Dmitrov camp, delivered to the site by the NKVD. They were fed so badly that they had to resort to eating grass and tree bark for nourishment. They died in their thousands and were buried in unmarked mounds along the length of the canal.

Kaganovich and Stalin worked closely together for five years in pursuit of a strange mix of terror and reconstruction. Kaganovich was both Stalin's enforcer – orchestrating the purges, implementing policies that caused famine in Ukraine – and his builder, overseeing the construction of a new Moscow. In summer, when Stalin left the capital to holiday on the Black Sea coast, Kaganovich would report to him every day. Their correspondence is full of accounts of Kaganovich's transformation of the capital in the most extraordinary level of detail, continually asking for the dictator's approval. In the summer of 1934, he writes:

Simultaneously we are levelling out a number of streets. We are tearing down part of the Kitai-gorod wall and from the Metropol Hotel, we are levelling out and widening the street. We are moving the statue of Ivan the Printer at the same site, but are taking it up to the site of the former church that used to stand behind the Kitai-gorod wall. We are tearing down the house opposite the National Hotel about which you gave your instructions. As a result a new square will be formed.

We have intense work under way in Moscow to clear a number of streets from the subway construction operation. We expanded Arbat Square, removed a piece of the boulevard up to the Gogol statue as you instructed and opened it up to Arbat Square. We have gotten work on the metro stations into gear; in a number of places we will not use marble, but something like artificial marble, cheap concrete plates, but done well and beautifully.¹⁶

Letters like this reveal the extent to which Stalin insisted on taking an interest in the smallest of decisions, with Kaganovich always deferring to him. A typical case was their discussion of the fate of a famous Moscow landmark, the 16th-century Sukharev Tower. Stalin wanted it removed along with most other traces of the tsarist city, but a courageous group of Moscow architects and art historians – among whom Iofan conspicuously did not number – lobbied hard to save it. Igor Grabar, Ivan Fomin and Ivan Zholtovsky wrote to Stalin to tell him that they 'resolutely objected to the destruction of a superb work of art'. They offered to find ways to allow for its retention while meeting Stalin's demands for a rationalized street plan. Kaganovich wrote to Stalin:

Regarding the Sukharev Tower: I assigned the architects to submit a plan for its reconstruction (the arch) so as to ease traffic. I did not promise that we were already dropping the demolition idea, but I told them that it depends on the degree to which their plan solves the traffic problem.

Now I would ask you to permit me to wait a while so as to get the plan from them. Since it will not satisfy us, of course, we will announce to them that we are demolishing the Sukharev Tower. If you don't think that we should wait, then of course I will organize this project more quickly, that is right now, without waiting for their plan.¹⁷

Stalin wrote back to Kaganovich to reassure him: 'I am not going to rush you with regard to the Sukharev Tower.'¹⁸ But the fate of this centuries-old landmark was already sealed, and he wrote again on 18 September 1934: 'It must definitely be demolished. The architects who object are blind and short-sighted.'¹⁹ Iofan said nothing in public or, as far as is known, in private about the Sukharev Tower. But given his willingness to support the demolition of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and to press for the clearance of historic structures on the site of the House on the Embankment, it is reasonable to believe that he put party policy ahead of Moscow's architectural heritage.

The delusional Hannes Meyer vainly claimed, despite all evidence to the contrary, that Stalin's plan for Moscow was not the wholesale mutilation of its historic core: '[T]hese masses demand from their architects a profound respect for their historical heritage. The Russian proleteriat did not conquer the feudal palaces and churches in order to destroy them....Soviet culture cannot flourish on a heap of rubble,' he asserted blithely.²⁰

The Sukharev Tower was far from being the only historic loss of the period. When the Iberian Gate and the chapel on Red Square were demolished, Kaganovich told those who objected: 'My aesthetic conception demands columns of demonstrators from the six districts of Moscow pouring into Red Square simultaneously.'²¹ Churches and monasteries were prime targets for destruction. Moscow had 460 Orthodox churches before the revolution; by 1930 this was reduced to 224, and in January 1933 just 100 were still in use.

Kaganovich's role extended far beyond reconfiguring Moscow's street pattern. Despite having no background in visual culture – his education was limited to an apprenticeship with a blacksmith and an early career as a shoemaker – he set about developing a specifically Stalinist approach to architecture and establishing the institutions required to deliver it. Control in itself was important to him, perhaps more so than a commitment to any one architect or architectural language.

In 1930, a design competition had been held for the Lenin Library. The winning entry, from Daniel Fridman, Dmitry Markov and Vladimir Fidman, was striking and progressive, but Kaganovich rejected it; instead, Vladimir Shchuko was given the project. This decision caused huge public controversy. Iofan himself made an intervention on behalf of the party, endorsing Shchuko's design as the best and claiming that there was no connection between progressive politics and modernist architecture. This was one of the key messages of Stalinism as applied to architecture.

The protests did not, of course, succeed in changing the outcome of the Lenin Library competition, but the argument seemed to provoke Kaganovich into a serious attempt to impose discipline on Soviet architects. It was after this that he began to reshape the professional landscape by dissolving all existing architectural factions and creating a new, more biddable organization. With little more in the way of research than a quick visit to Berlin to see the metro system and another to Vienna to explore its social housing, he established himself as an authority with the power to define Soviet architecture. He decreed the setting up of a single architectural union in 1932 and an academy to provide it with intellectual leadership.

Membership of the union was essential for anyone who wanted to work in the field. There was the compensation of a certain amount of professional privilege, notably the establishment of a House of the Architects in a neo-gothic Moscow mansion as well as a country club retreat. Hannes Meyer characterized the union as 'bubbling over with the life of more than a thousand members and about 500 young candidates. Shows, lectures, courses of study, meetings, follow one another'; it was somewhere,

he said, for architects to ‘meet with the federation of actors or of painters to talk over the common problems of Soviet culture’. He described ‘receptions in honor of the best masons from the metro, or of North Pole explorers, or of the world-famous Soviet women parachute aces’.²²

Within Kaganovich’s new system, all practising architects were herded into huge state studios headed by so-called ‘masters’, one of whom was Iofan. Meyer described Moscow’s architects working in ‘ten very comfortable and rather elegant workshops’. Within the workshops, he explained, ‘the social cell of professional work is the brigade, which has draftsmen, technicians, engineers and economists. A union of different brigades makes up a sector, which is headed by a master architect. All brigades compete among themselves in the fulfilment of the plan “socialist competition”. Gosplan has an annual plan of production for the brigade.’²³

Before Stalin put Kaganovich to work, the Soviet Union had been seen as one of the countries most open to building progressive architecture anywhere in the world. It had some of the world’s more interesting contemporary architects, even if a chronic lack of resources made it hard for them to build. But now, as in many parts of the world, architecture here was becoming a political language. Rightly or wrongly, there was a perception that left-wing politics correlated with architectural radicalism while historical forms were associated with right-wing and conservative regimes.

In Germany, the Nazis associated the flat roofs of the 1920s Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart with alien Arab architecture and subversive intent. Equally, the Bauhaus building in Dessau was presented by the Nazis alternately as a ‘cathedral of Bolshevism’ and ‘a synagogue’.²⁴ In the years immediately after the revolution, the Soviet Union was ready to use the international prestige of its most progressive architects to consolidate support from around the world, reinforcing the perception that it had a forward-looking and dynamic culture. But as Stalin consolidated his hold on power, he and Kaganovich became increasingly uncomfortable with the presumption that modernism was the architectural language of socialism. This was partly because they were afraid that cultural freedom would undermine their grip on the levers of power – but it was also because they understood that the abstraction of modernism would likely fail to reach the masses that they wanted to motivate. In its place, they sought a more effective form of three-dimensional propaganda.

Kaganovich set out to impose the same cultural dominance on architects that applied to writers and artists, but he was perfectly aware that this would be a challenge – not least because architecture, compared to literature, was inherently more difficult for the masses to understand. Stalin, with Kaganovich as his megaphone, wanted to use architecture to appeal not to the cultural avant-garde but as a powerful propaganda tool that would send an unmistakable and convincing message to the people. ‘Literature speaks in the very same language as all people speak. Architects themselves must speak in a form in which there is much that is elemental and little that is conscious. Architecture speaks to the unconscious: and thus has to be in a form comprehensible to the masses,’ Kaganovich asserted.²⁵

Stalin and Kaganovich were looking to find an architectural language broadly analogous to the socialist realism used by the leader’s favoured painters, writers, poets and filmmakers; a language that could be used to reinforce Stalin’s authority and support the myths of the society he claimed to have created for the masses. They did not believe that the abstraction of modernism was equal to this task. Stalin needed his buildings to be big and impressive, with the sheen of gleaming marble: Trump Tower as built by forced labour. But unlike Soviet literature, which had a plausible track record of successful communist writers, there were very few critically credible communist architects.

Kaganovich was surprisingly candid in sharing this difficulty with the communist cell of the Moscow branch of the architects’ union, acknowledging the serious lack of respected communist architects. Of its 1,500 branch members, only 100 held Communist Party cards. He told Alabyan and Iofan to their faces: ‘Among writers, communists are far stronger than among architects.’²⁶ Where, he wanted to know, was the architectural equivalent of Maksim Gorky – a communist who had unassailable talent? None of the profession’s leaders, whether constructivists or traditionalists, were party members, and Kaganovich could not create the language of architectural Stalinism for them.

‘Marxist science in architecture is less rich than in other areas. We approach the congress with little capital as the number of communist architects is limited,’ he lamented.²⁷

He set up the Soviet Architectural Academy to develop policies on every aspect of the field, as well as an architectural museum; and he began to plan for a conference – the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects – that would determine the Soviet approach to architecture once and for all. Year after year, this kept being put off, rather like the celebrations of the Hapsburg Imperial Jubilee in Robert Musil’s novel *The Man Without Qualities*. Initially it was to be in 1935; then 1936; and it was finally staged only in 1937. In preparing for it, Kaganovich ordered: ‘The party must combat the denuded architecture of nihilism which reduced decoration to mere daubing. The creative use of stucco, plaster, marble and paint was the foundation for a communist architecture more beautiful than that created by Rome and Greece.’²⁸ The so-called formalists were ‘to be flogged’, while constructivists would be criticized in more measured terms: ‘Millions live in houses they have designed.’²⁹ When the conference eventually took place, it was Iofan who was allowed to speak in the most detail about a single building – the Palace of the Soviets.

No matter how badly Stalin and Kaganovich wanted to control every aspect of Soviet life, they were incapable of inventing something that did not exist. Their ideas about architecture were always derived from the work of others. They knew what they did not want when they saw it – hence the demolition in 1937 of Vyacheslav Oltarzhevsky’s entrance pavilion to Moscow’s permanent agricultural exhibition, before it was even completed, on the basis that it was not monumental enough. But this did not help to define, in positive terms, an architectural language that loyal architects could use.

As Kaganovich remarked to the communist cell of the architects’ union: ‘There are a couple of general truths; it is impossible to reject the classics completely, and we cannot follow the urbanists; but this is clearly not sufficient.’³⁰ In 1933, he accepted that ‘At present we have no clearly worked-out directions in architecture,’ and he had already suggested that ‘A single style cannot be decreed – it is a matter of creativity which is not subject to such decrees.’³¹

It became clear where all this was leading when he began to wrestle with a definition of socialist realism in architecture. ‘What is it? The answer can only be this: it does not of course merely copy or photograph a (natural) form but addresses forms that exist in life. Technique has progressed far in our country and now gives architecture much larger capabilities...on this question we must set out a number of propositions.’³² Socialist realism was ‘not a copying, not a reproduction of forms taken from life, but a creative reworking and artistic formulation of realistic forms which also made use of Russian historic style’.³³

Iofan’s early success was based on a sought-after combination of characteristics: he was a member of the Communist Party who was also an accomplished architect, capable of winning international attention. He had spent time working abroad, with the prestige that suggested. He occupied a unique position as a bridge between the pre-revolutionary academicians (who nevertheless impressed the party hierarchy) and the constructivist radicals, whom the party saw as bringing much-needed international attention and prestige but never entirely trusted. His biggest role was to give the party leadership a sense of what Soviet architecture could be – not in a theoretical sense or as a drawing, which they would be unlikely to understand, but as a range of built options that they could actually see.

In this process, Iofan became a model for others to follow; or perhaps, more accurately, the version of Iofan’s architecture that took its direction from Stalin became the model. His role from 1930 onwards was not to lead the infighting on committees or at the academy, but to maintain a presence and remain available when needed while also continuing to build. So when Kaganovich reorganized the architectural profession into studios each led by a master architect, Iofan was one of them. When Kaganovich created the architects’ union, Iofan was a member of the presidium. When Kaganovich set up the architectural academy, Iofan was one of the first academicians. And when party members were asked for examples of successful Soviet buildings they invariably pointed to Iofan’s work, particularly the Palace of the Soviets and the Paris pavilion.

Iofan became a fixture of the Moscow architectural establishment. He was a member of Arkhplan, the architecture and planning committee of the Moscow council, as soon as it was set up in 1932, along with Hannes Meyer, Ernst May, Vladimir Shchuko and Moisei Ginzburg. But this level of influence brought with it clear dangers: the rector of the academy, Mikhail Kryukov, the provost, Aleksandr Aleksandrov, and the academic secretary, Genrikh Ludvig, were all purged. Of the three, only Ludvig survived after fifteen years in the gulag, accused of spying for Germany, Italy and the Vatican. Hannes Meyer once defined Stalinist architecture as a narrative:

The Soviet architect is not confined by the usual modern assumptions that architecture is merely a technical problem; this conception is cancelled by the client-masses. In building their cities, they want to be surrounded by artistic works that commemorate the heroes of collective labour, the Stakhanovites and the pioneers of science in their country. They want to honour by means of sculpture and mural painting the great builder of socialism, Krivonos, who perfected the efficiency of locomotives; Vinogradova, the great textile worker; the woman farmer, Demchenko, famous for the cultivation of sugar beets. These same masses who inhabit one-sixth of the Earth demand the representation of their revolutionary history and of their collective life.

The masses expect their architect comrades to be interpreters of their national culture, of their regional folklores and of their local building forms, developing them without imitation.³⁴

Meyer's formulation precisely captures the spirit of the elaborate narrative decorative scheme that Iofan, along with teams of artists, painters and designers, would develop for the Palace of the Soviets. As they envisioned it, the building would amount to a three-dimensional encyclopaedia of the birth and triumph of socialism: every square inch of the surface of its interior would carry a message designed to represent the party's programme and history. The general approach was an exact parallel to the Catholic church's use of art and architecture during the counter-reformation. Iofan's design was intended to serve as a model for monumental buildings to be emulated by architects throughout the Soviet Union – and they duly followed its example, even though the palace itself was never realized.

Palace of the Soviets

Standing on the stage of Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre in 1922, framed by its golden proscenium arch, Sergei Kirov, leader of the Transcaucasian delegation, celebrated the triumphant foundation of the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The communist parties of Russia, Ukraine, Transcaucasia and Belorussia had overwhelmed their many enemies, domestic and foreign, and come together for a founding convention that would reconstitute the Russian empire as the Soviet Union.



The Palace of the Soviets was the project that made Iofan famous, cost him his reputation and was never realized. In its most publicized and extreme form, it was as much the design of Stalin himself – egged on by Iofan’s rivals Shchuko and Gelfreikh to build higher – as that of its nominal architect, Iofan.

Moscow had not been a seat of government for more than 200 years, and it lacked any venues large and grand enough to accommodate a quasi-parliamentary institution in appropriate style. Kirov – who had terrorized the city of Astrakhan during the civil war and been directly responsible for thousands of casualties – envisaged building a ‘people’s palace’, both as a practical solution to this problem and to symbolize the birth of the new state. He believed that building a debating chamber spacious enough to keep pace with an ever-increasing number of delegates was essential to allow the union to grow.

He urged his audience to ‘mark what we have created here today with a living monument’:

It won’t be long before we find ourselves feeling cramped, even in this magnificent room. There will come a time when there will not be enough seats on these benches for the delegates of all the republics united in our Union and when we will come to feel that the mighty chorus of the Internationale no longer sounds appropriate under this huge dome.

We will need a more spacious hall for our assemblies soon. In this palace of the workers, to be built in the capital of the Union on the most beautiful and the best square, every worker and peasant will be able to find all that they need to expand their horizons. At the same time this building should be an emblem of the triumph of communism not only in our country but also in the world. It is rightly said that we are sweeping the palaces of bankers, landowners and kings from the face of the earth with lightning speed. So, let’s build this new palace of the workers and peasants in their place. Let us gather everything in which our country is rich, and invest in this monument all the creativity of our peasants and workers, and show all our friends and our enemies too that we, so-called ‘semi-Asiatics’, are capable of embellishing the sinful earth with monuments which our enemies can only dream of.¹

As the minute-takers of the Soviet era put it, sounding like a Greek chorus, his words ‘were repeatedly interrupted with prolonged and stormy, standing applause’.²

Twelve years later, in December 1934, Kirov was assassinated; at which point Boris Iofan began to credit him with having had the original idea to build the Palace of the Soviets. Iofan subsequently referred to what he described as ‘the speech of the ardent tribune of the revolution, Sergei Mironovich Kirov, brutally murdered by Trotskyist Zinovievite Bukharinite elements, who introduced the proposal [to build the palace] in the names of the workers of the Transcaucasus’.³ Parts of Kirov’s speech were quoted in a 1939 book published by the Soviet Academy of Architecture, documenting the version of the palace that had been approved for construction. In it, Iofan wrote that ‘the words spoken by Sergei Kirov determined the overall character of the future Palace of the Soviets’.⁴

In fact, Kirov had shown little inclination to act upon his speech personally – but Iofan’s emphasis on the palace’s connection to this dead hero of the state was a reminder, at a difficult moment, of the project’s political objectives, and an attempt to drum up much-needed support. The whole construction process was clearly in trouble, and Iofan may also have hoped to deflect attention from the fact that the completion of Government House had left a significant gap in his studio’s workload.

Although Iofan had originally claimed that the palace would be completed in just two years, it did not actually break ground until a full six years after his appointment as chief architect. All along the way, deadlines were missed with alarming regularity. Iofan was due to present a finalized architectural concept by January 1934; he did not. The construction drawings were meant to be complete by the first of May 1934; they were not. Progress behind the endless fence that ringed the site was painfully slow, and troubling rumours about technical difficulties began to circulate.

In his account of his ordeal in a series of Soviet labour camps, Thomas Sgovio – the young American communist who, before his arrest, had visited Iofan at home to seek advice about getting into art school – recalls meeting a Canadian named Webster. They were both part of a group of one hundred prisoners sharing what Sgovio described as a cell designed to hold thirty, within the secret police HQ at Moscow’s Lubyanka Building. ‘He had been arrested as a foreign spy, while working as a technician on the Palace of the Soviets,’ writes Sgovio. ‘Excavations began on the foundations a year before my

arrest; the rumours spread that work could not continue because of water seepage from the Moskva River. It was one big fiasco. The Soviets never acknowledged this. But all the top management was arrested and accused of wrecking and sabotage. I met a few of them later in other cells.⁵

Against such a background, emphasizing the palace's connection with Kirov – who, in death, had become an important figure in the mythology of the Soviet Union – helped to deflect criticism. Kirov had been shot dead by an obscure and apparently troubled rank-and-file member of the Leningrad branch of the Communist Party. By standing guard over his funeral bier, Stalin had beatified him as a revolutionary martyr. After all the millions of lives lost during the revolution, the civil war and the famines, the death of this one party leader was used to justify purges that would kill millions more in the three years that followed. No matter what other crimes the defendants in the first show trials were accused of, their indictments invariably included the charge of culpability for Kirov's murder.

Following his return to Moscow from Italy, Iofan had quickly acquired the impressive track record he needed in order to be taken seriously as a contender to design the palace. Within six years he had built three substantial housing developments, a new physics research institute and a major expansion of Moscow's Agricultural Academy. He had the necessary access to the party leadership and the political skills to make himself indispensable to the success of such an important project, without attracting undue attention.

But despite all of that, Iofan would devote more than twenty-five years of his life to what ultimately turned out to be a futile attempt at creating the world's tallest building. It was designed to be the symbolic heart of the Soviet Union, a kind of Vatican of socialism: half an official seat of government, half a forum for delirious public spectacles. In the end, it did come to define his career – just not in the way he wanted. He became more famous for not having built it than for any of his positive achievements.

Notable among the palace's architectural precursors was the Tatlin Tower in Petrograd, created by the visionary artist, architect and designer Vladimir Tatlin. He had planned it as a revolutionary monument to the Third International in 1920 (predating Sergei Kirov's speech by almost two years). Its spiralling structure contained three slowly rotating geometric elements: a cube to house the Comintern's conference hall, a cone to accommodate its offices, and a cylinder for a radio and telegraph station. Despite the apparent differences in their architectural languages, Tatlin's dynamic structure and its vast scale would influence Iofan's design. Tatlin did not enter the competition, but when he saw the results he wrote to the government, offering to do better. The Vesnin brothers' 1923 design for the Moscow Palace of Labour was another significant precedent: produced shortly before Iofan's return to the Soviet Union from Italy, it was a project he would certainly have known and studied.

Iofan coaxed the palace project, step by step, from a nebulous idea supposedly born out of Kirov's speech into a concrete plan, and then to the messy reality of a construction site. It took six years of preparation, from producing the initial competition brief in February 1931 to devising and then staging a sequence of competitions in four rounds, before a start was finally made on digging the foundations.

Initially, Iofan had the support of his friend and patron Aleksei Rykov, who set in motion the administrative machinery that would be used to deliver the palace. But before Iofan could even start work, Rykov had been outmanoeuvred by Stalin and had lost his grip on power. The Council for the Construction of the Palace of the Soviets was set up early in 1931 to take nominal political control of the process. Its chair was Vyacheslav Molotov, recently appointed as the Soviet premier in succession to Rykov, who had been demoted to running the post office.

Helpfully for Iofan, Molotov's private office was headed by Aron Vizner, another close friend from his time in Italy. The council members were Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin's enforcer; Kliment Voroshilov, chair of the revolutionary military council; Konstantin Ukhovnikov from the Moscow Soviet; and Avel Yenukidze, who was the member in day-to-day charge until he was arrested and shot in 1937. Reporting to the council was the Directorate of Construction, a team of technical experts including Iofan himself; and an advisory group made up of politicians, scientists and assorted cultural figures. A similar group, with many of the same members, had overseen the building of Lenin's tomb.

In the early days of the project Yenukidze worked closely with Iofan, as he had previously done on the House on the Embankment. Iofan tabled a draft brief, a timetable and a multi-stage competition scheme, all of which were adopted by the Construction Council in February 1931. Shortly afterwards he was given the unambiguous title of chief architect. As well as organizing the competition, his role, according to the council, was 'on the basis of the chosen projects, to prepare both preliminary and final designs along with working drawings with cost estimates for all types of construction and specialized work'. Significantly, there was no mention of the role of the competition winner.

Iofan had learned some lessons from his uncomfortable experiences with the House on the Embankment project, when Rykov's unilateral decision to give him the job had drawn sharp public criticism. He was determined that the charge of failing to follow proper procedure would not be levelled against him again. This time he planned to have not just one competition, but four; and he also wanted to ensure that his role would not be limited to the realization of another architect's ideas. Mikhail Kryukov was appointed as head of construction to take care of the administrative details. Throughout the process, Iofan showed himself to be both an effective strategist – encouraging the Soviet hierarchy to go ahead and build the palace, and devising the steps by which it would be realized – and a skilful tactician. He outmanoeuvred Kryukov, who, according to the historian Katherine Zubovich, unsuccessfully appealed to Molotov to have him dismissed, and he survived the political carnage that would claim the lives of Kryukov and Yenukidze.

It was Stalin himself who decided on three of the building's most crucial defining aspects: its location, its size and the inclusion of a massive representation of Lenin. Iofan evidently never challenged him, although he must have known that each of these decisions would make the job of realizing the palace more difficult – perhaps even impossible. The dictator's first public intervention came after walking along the banks of the Moskva with Iofan on a June morning in 1931. As Iofan later recounted to Isaak Eigel:

Comrade Stalin, together with the building committee of the palace chaired by Comrade Molotov, visited the grounds of the Church of Christ the Saviour. A large group of Moscow architects was in attendance. The choice of site was confirmed that very same day. I believe Comrade Stalin was attracted by its excellent situation at the centre of the city near to the Moskva River and the Kremlin. Comrade Stalin carefully inspected the site and listened attentively to the views of the assembled architects. Many architect comrades were wary of the area's uneven configuration, and its comparatively small size.⁶

Iofan knew – from bitter experience with the House on the Embankment on the other side of the river – how difficult it would be to excavate deep foundations in waterlogged clay. He was well aware that building on the site he had proposed would be much more straightforward. Nevertheless, as a result of Stalin's visit, just before the public competition was announced the site for the palace was switched from the two blocks Iofan had envisaged – between Okhotny Ryad, Tverskaya Street and Bolshaya Dmitrovka Street, near the Kitai-gorod wall and Red Square – to the site of the cathedral. Iofan met Molotov in his office the day after the leader's visit, when the Construction Council formally agreed to the demolition of the largest church in Moscow.

The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, designed by Konstantin Thon, was the product of a long-delayed pledge by Alexander I to give thanks to the Almighty for Napoleon's defeat in 1812. It had been completed only in 1883. In the years after the revolution, the church became a centre of opposition to the Soviets and the regime responded by expelling the clergy from the building, ending its use as a place of worship and leaving it empty and locked. Shifting the Palace of the Soviets to such a conspicuous site was a gesture that completely transformed the project. Clearly this was not going to be just another conventional complex of buildings – it had to be a national monument, a credible replacement for one of Russia's most prominent buildings.



Moscow's largest church, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, was completed in 1883 to celebrate the Russian victory over Napoleon. Beheaded and dismantled in 1917, the neighbouring monument to Tsar Alexander III (at right) was an early victim of Bolshevik iconoclasm.

There were protests from those still brave enough to challenge Stalin's attack on religion, and from those who saw the building as a valuable architectural and artistic achievement. The daily newspaper *Izvestiya*, however, refused to publish any letters criticizing the destruction of the church. Iofan was well aware of the controversy, and both he and Olga privately had doubts about the suitability of the site. But in public, he took the view that there were no grounds to preserve it on the basis of architectural merit. Just as, despite his years of absorbing the lessons of architectural history in Rome, he had readily attempted to demolish a 17th-century church some weeks earlier in order to make room for a kindergarten at the House on the Embankment, he now coolly dismissed the old cathedral. He described it as 'huge and cumbersome, looking like a cake, or a samovar. It overwhelmed the surrounding houses and the people in them with its official, cold, lifeless architecture, a reflection of the talentless Russian autocracy and the highly placed builders who had created this temple for landowners and merchants. The proletarian revolution is boldly raising its hand against this cumbersome edifice which symbolizes the power and the taste of the lords of old Moscow.'⁷

Demolition took five months to complete, with a highly theatrical finale in December 1931 when strategically placed charges of dynamite brought the remaining structure down. The secret police made sure that the gangs of workmen charged with stripping the gold from the domed roof handed over all spoils to the state. (Walter Duranty, Moscow correspondent of the *New York Times* and one of the more useful of Stalin's 'useful idiots', claimed that it was only brass.) Some of the marble and granite from the exterior was salvaged for reuse in the building of the Lenin Library. The best of the icons and

artworks were allocated to Moscow's museums or sold to raise foreign currency, but many pieces of statuary and commemorative stained glass were deliberately smashed to pieces.



Stalin had the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour demolished in 1931 to make room for the Palace of the Soviets. Its destruction was a huge undertaking, involving hundreds of labourers and horses, and a light railway to cart away the rubble. The explosive finale saw the carefully orchestrated use of dynamite to bring down the last fragments.

Destroying the cathedral was a massive undertaking requiring 100 dumper trucks, 200 draft horses, 2,000 labourers and a specially constructed light railway. The Construction Council calculated that 500 million bricks, reinforced by an iron frame, had gone into the structure, but the first step in dismantling it was to strip off 600 cartloads of valuable marble for reuse. Eight three-car freight trains, operating throughout the day for three months, were then employed to remove all the debris. Screened from public view, workmen used chains to pull down monumental representations of Russian saints from the cathedral's façades. They could be glimpsed lying on the ground in piles of rubble, rather like huge images of Ozymandias lying in the sands of the desert, alongside a snow-covered avalanche of dislodged bricks.



Before its final destruction in 1931, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was stripped of its most precious facing stone, which was salvaged for reuse. Some of the sculpture went to museums, along with the icons and murals from the interior. The rest was destroyed in the Bolshevik war on religion.

The razing of the cathedral was just one of several fronts in Stalin's onslaught on historic Moscow, which in Lenin's time had enjoyed a certain protection from harm. Among many other historic monuments, a 1.5-mile stretch of the 16th-century Kitai-gorod wall, along with fourteen towers and six gates, was demolished in an orgy of destruction that drew in thousands of young communist volunteers as eager participants. Stalin's men also saw to the demolition of eleven of Moscow's twenty-five monasteries, one of which became a car park for government limousines. The Society of Militant Atheists was established to help convince the masses that religion had nothing to offer them.

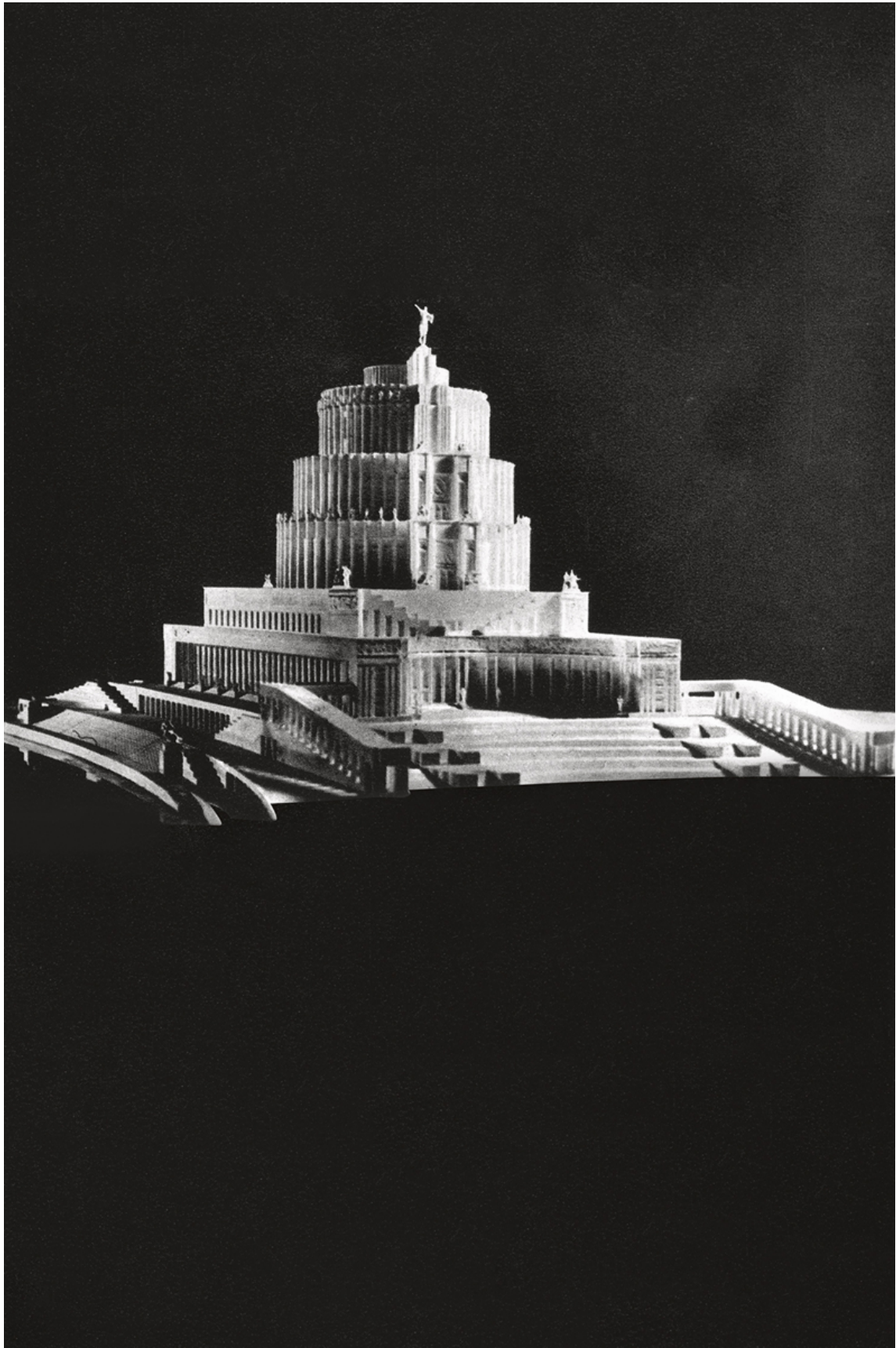
Any criticism of all this destruction was firmly dismissed by officials like Lev Perchik, chief of the Moscow planning department, who wrote in 1934:

We have completely snuffed out this kind of reactionary opinion. No one would dare speak up now in such a way, because millions know from experience that Moscow could not have lived another day in the stone swaddling clothes of its infancy. We still sometimes hear timid voices complaining about the undue severity of surgical methods. Such claims only amuse us. No one has identified a single demolished building which should have been saved; it is easy to find dozens more which must be demolished. We cannot reconstruct a city like Moscow without a surgeon's scalpel.⁸

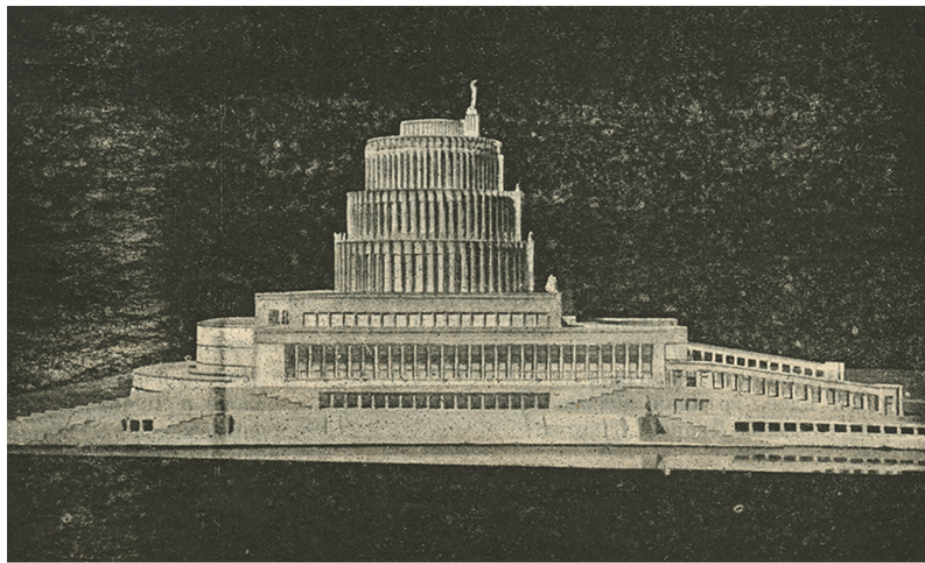
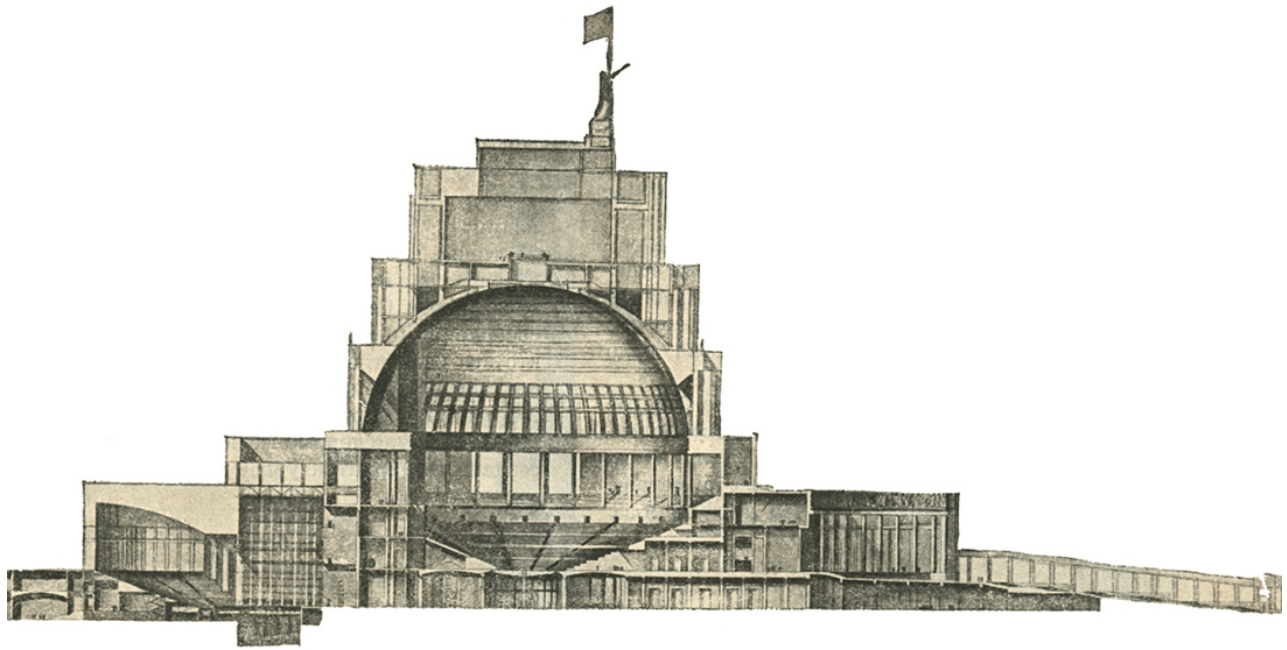
The first stage of the competition for the Palace of the Soviets, which took place before Stalin had ordered the clearance of the cathedral site, was essentially a research exercise designed to test a variety of possible locations and aspects of the brief. In all, fifteen Soviet teams took part. They represented the whole spectrum of architectural opinion, from radical constructivists to academic classicists, from Aleksandr Vesnin to Ivan Zholtovsky, Vladimir Gelfreikh and Vladimir Shchuko. Iofan was both an organizer and a participant, as were other architect members of the technical commission such as Karo Alabyan. Archival evidence suggests that five of the teams were asked by Iofan to use their submissions to explore possible solutions to specific problems raised by the brief – pointing to a strong presumption

by the Construction Council that whatever the outcome of the competition, Iofan would be leading the design process.

Working with Olga, whose role in the studio was to be a sounding board for her husband, as well as his brother Dmitry and his long-term assistant Dmitry Tsiperovich, Iofan split the two palace halls into distinct, easily understood visual elements. He positioned the larger hall as the climax to a vast public space defined by a colonnade. The hall's form was clearly derived from ideas he had previously used in the 1,500-seat *Udarnik* cinema of the House on the Embankment complex, with its distinctive roof of nested shells. In the centre of the space was a free-standing tower topped by the figure of a factory worker designed by sculptor Nikolai Andreyev, whose brother would later work on the figure that Iofan incorporated into his pavilion for the New York World's Fair. The smaller hall formed the other side of the square, which was left open towards the riverfront.



The domed great hall, wrapped in three circular tiers and topped by a modest sculpture, sits on a rectangular base inspired by the Victor Emmanuel monument in Rome.



Iofan's huge but still rational design from 1932 is likely the closest to what he would have wanted to build.

Entries were (supposedly) submitted anonymously, each with an identifying code name. Iofan called his 'Labour Liberated', in reference to a series of monuments that had been planned for cities all over the country as part of Lenin's post-revolutionary initiative. The first of these – a giant-size, classically inspired naked proletarian casting aside the chains of capitalism – had been unveiled in Petrograd in May 1920; a second followed in Yekaterinburg, and a third had been planned in Moscow for the plinth once occupied by Alexander III near the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Lenin himself had presided over what was described as the laying of the foundation stone, although in fact, since the plinth existed already, he had unveiled only a small plaque attached to it announcing the forthcoming arrival of another version of Labour Liberated. The actual statue, however, was never installed, and the plaque was quietly removed.

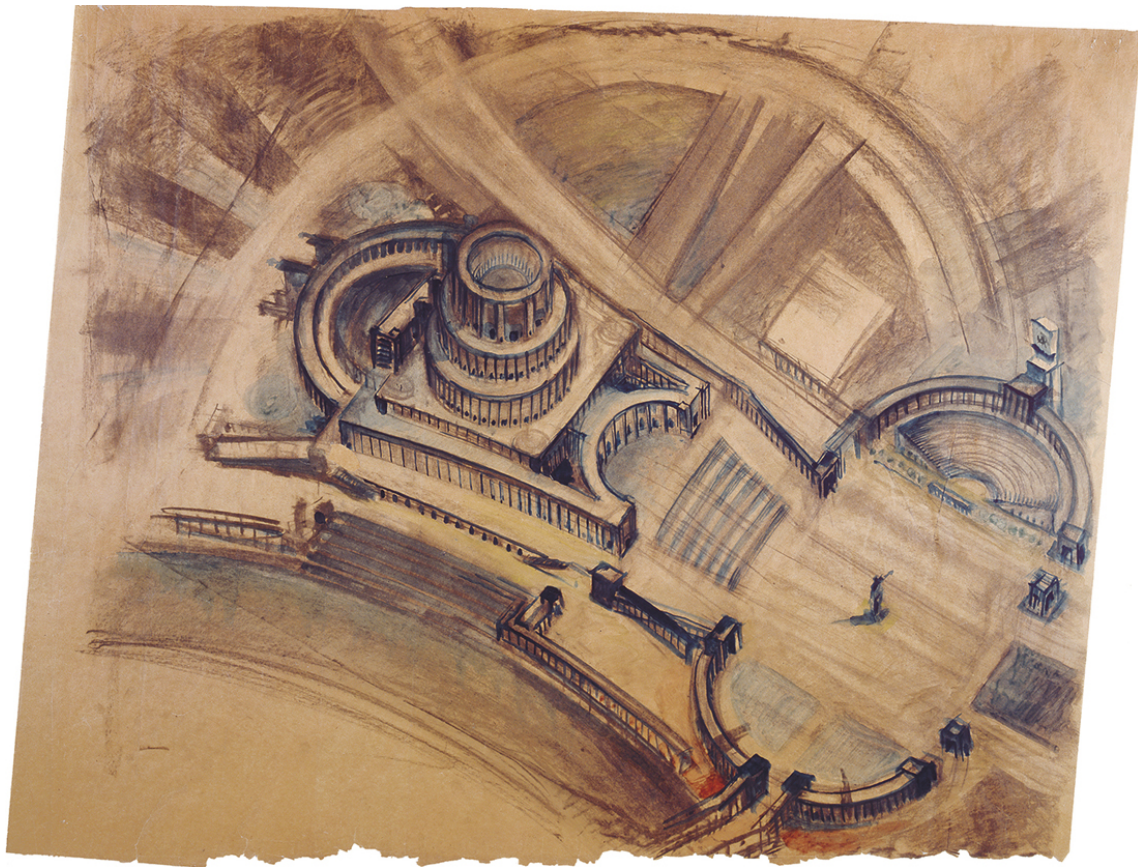
Having seen how the cathedral site could be made to work for the Palace of the Soviets and what it could sensibly accommodate, the Politburo agreed to move to the next stage of the competition process by authorizing in principle the building of the palace. At this stage it was on the basis of the brief of two

halls, one with 15,000 seats and the other with 5,000 – numbers that would subsequently be increased to incorporate a further 7,000 seats.

A public display of the fifteen schemes from the first round opened on 14 July 1931. The proletariat was not, it seems, impressed by the constructivist submissions. However, according to Hannes Meyer, visitors to the exhibition did offer a range of helpful suggestions including the use of folding seats, seating that could be hidden away beneath the floor of the main hall, and advice on the provision of refreshments for visitors to the building.

A second – this time international – open competition launched in the autumn, specifying that the palace was to be built on the site of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. This stage was designed as much to create a sense of the project's worldwide significance as to find a design or appoint an architect. It could reasonably be described as a pseudo-competition, even a kind of architectural show trial. The Soviet Union wanted the world to take notice of what it was doing and it was prepared to pay famous architects to take part as a way of attracting publicity, even if it had no intention of allowing them to build in Moscow.

Iofan and Kryukov looked around the world for suitable international candidates to add credibility to the selection process. They had a budget to appoint twelve. Kryukov negotiated fees with Le Corbusier, Auguste Perret, Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Hans Poelzig and Armando Brasini (Iofan's former employer in Rome). Initially Le Corbusier was offered \$2,000, asked for \$4,000 and agreed on \$3,000. Six others were also paid to take part, including two Americans.



Iofan's studies for the palace's urban setting reflected his experiences of Rome, and the colonnades that enclose the piazza in front of St Peter's at the Vatican. Iofan added a central figure to the vast open space he designed for parades, but in later versions he was instructed to remove all sense of enclosure.



Boris Iofan (centre, in jacket), his wife Olga, his brother Dmitry (centre, in smock), and his team with their prize-winning design in the international competition for the Palace of the Soviets.

The original list of Americans to be invited, approved by Iofan, included Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra and Norman Bel Geddes. But Albert Kahn, a Detroit-based architect who was running a massive programme of factory building in the Soviet Union, took a jaundiced view of modernism of every variety when consulted on the competition. He put forward the names of Thomas Lamb and Joseph Urban – suggestions that came close to satire. Lamb specialized in exotic art deco cinemas, incorporating Hindu and Moorish themes in one project, Mayan in another; while the Austrian-born Urban was responsible for designing opera sets around the world and building the Mar-a-Lago complex in Florida, later owned by Donald Trump. But Kahn's recommendations were duly accepted.

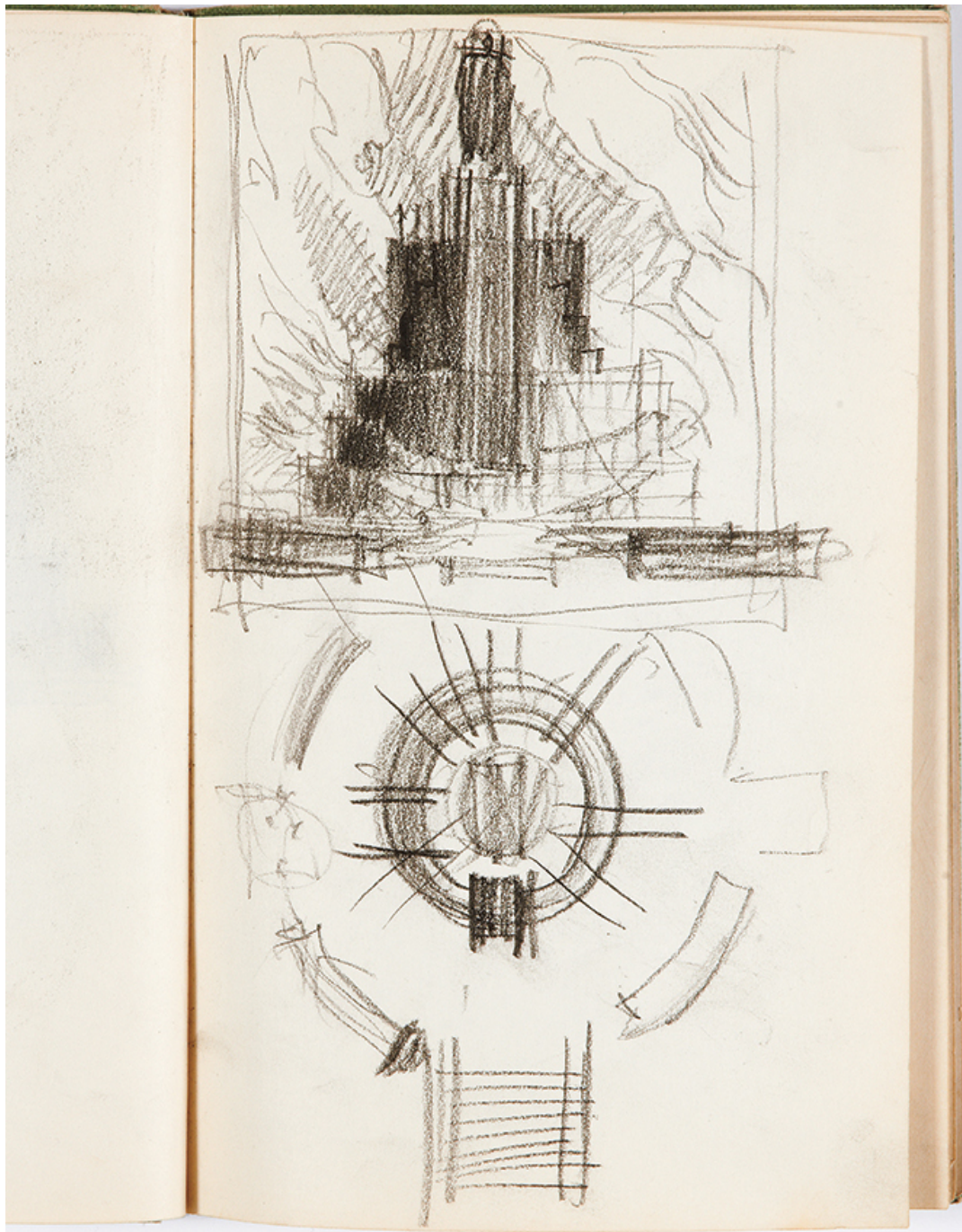
Of the paid participants, Gropius and Poelzig, who would also take part in the competition to build Hitler's Reichsbank in Berlin two years later, competed against Mendelsohn, Perret and Le Corbusier (whose Tsentrosouz complex in Moscow was still under construction and progressing painfully slowly). The competition also attracted such unexpected and notable entrants as the artist Naum Gabo. The brief – to produce 'a monumental structure outstanding in its architectural formulation' – was made public in September 1931, with the first of December that year as the deadline for submissions. It was stipulated that the design must:

- correspond with the character of the times in order to reflect the will of the workers to build socialism
- express the special purpose of the building

- show the building's special significance as an artistic and architectural monument of the capital of the USSR.⁹

In total, there were 160 professional submissions and another 100 from the public.

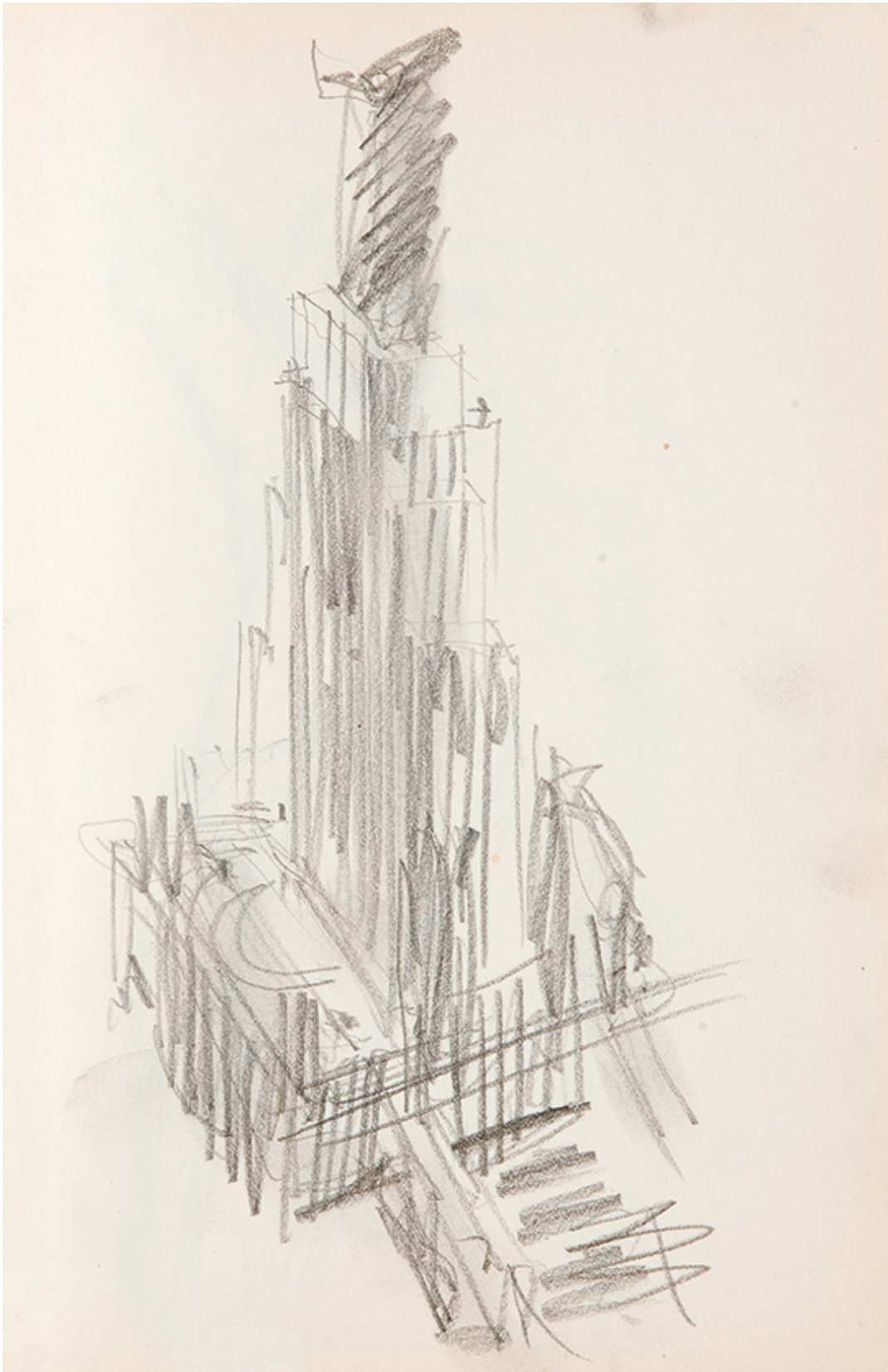
The European modernists produced a range of impressive projects. Le Corbusier's design could have been one of the greatest buildings of his career. It consisted of a pair of fan-shaped auditoria facing each other across a sequence of public spaces, with the public significance of the scheme signalled by a soaring catenary arch. Le Corbusier and his fifteen assistants laboured day and night for three months to work through every technical detail, from the acoustics to the air conditioning. The submission was delivered to the Soviet embassy in Paris, but even after it had been dispatched in the diplomatic bag to Moscow, Le Corbusier kept sending additional drawings and even a film of the model to give a sense of what it would have been like to move around it.



After being named as a prize-winner in the first stage of the Palace of the Soviets competition, Iofan revised his design to take in the instructions from the party leadership, calling for more height and the incorporation of a figure on the top of the structure.



Iofan's sketchbook records his exploration of various forms for the palace's tower: circular (above) as well as rectangular (below).



It was important to him to achieve a proportional balance between the height of the tower and the figure on top of it, as well as between the scale of the base and the tower.

In the absence of a formally constituted jury for the competition, Molotov established an advisory committee chaired by Gleb Krzhizhanovsky, a scientist who had been a friend of Lenin. The committee

members included the writer Maksim Gorky, the theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky, the former people's commissar for enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky and the sculptor Sergei Merkurov, as well as architects such as Hannes Meyer. Merkurov, better known today for his association with a colourful and sexually explicit design he is said to have created for the Cyrillic alphabet, specialized in the technically demanding creation of death masks of famous individuals, including that of Lenin. He would later win a competition to work with Iofan on the gigantic representation of Lenin for the palace, and would also make the Stalin statue for Iofan's Soviet pavilion in Paris.

Aleksei Tolstoy, a distant relative of both Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev and a successful writer of science fiction, was appointed to the advisory committee at the end of 1931. He came closest to putting into words the kind of architecture that Stalin was looking for. In 'Searches for Monumentality', an article published in *Izvestiya* shortly before the second-round results were announced, he attacked both Le Corbusier and the designers of American-style skyscrapers. He called the work of the former a product of 'over-refined personalities who shelter from the world with the automobile glasses of spatial predators', while the latter would result in 'magical castles for the high servants of capital'.

Americanism and Corbusianry have hitherto found a good number of partisans in this country, despite the fact that these two styles are hostile (and useless) to us. Corbusianry is quality of materials, combined with the aesthetics of the high bourgeoisie, whose sensory perceptions are restricted to the pleasures of the moment. It is a latter-day feudal fortress, the home of a bandit protected by impregnable walls of gold.¹⁰

Tolstoy had recently returned from Germany – after an abrupt somersault in his political views, moving seamlessly from anti-Bolshevik monarchist exile to Stalinist loyalist – to take up an honoured position as an officially approved intellectual in Moscow. In his post-war polemic *The Suppression of Literature*, George Orwell described Tolstoy in the most damning terms: 'The USSR is a large, rapidly developing country which has an acute need of scientific workers and, consequently, treats them generously. Provided that they steer clear of dangerous subjects such as psychology, scientists are privileged persons. Writers, on the other hand, are viciously persecuted. It is true that literary prostitutes like Ilya Ehrenburg or Aleksei Tolstoy are paid huge sums of money, but the only thing which is of any value to the writer as such – his freedom of expression – is taken away from him.'¹¹ In the same piece, Orwell had suggested that 'Poetry might survive in a totalitarian age, and certain arts or half-arts, such as architecture, might even find tyranny beneficial, but the prose writer would have no choice between silence or death.'¹²

All 160 architects' schemes were exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts (later renamed the Pushkin Museum) from December 1931 through to the following summer. Kryukov left the commission in 1932 and subsequently became dean of the newly established Academy of Architecture; he was replaced by Vasily Mikhailov, brought back from the Dnieper hydro-electric construction site to which he had been banished for making a mess of the House on the Embankment project. Not only had he worked closely with Iofan before, but they were now fellow residents of the House.

Iofan's submission for the competition differed from his earlier studies. He consolidated the two halls into a single structure and moved the worker-topped tower closer to it. The tower, which combined a square plan edged with an inset spiralling staircase, somehow managed to suggest both Tatlin and ancient Babylon. The figure of the worker, which had previously attracted Stalin's attention, still remained on a relatively modest scale. Importantly, Iofan had envisaged a fluid combination of a monument and a set of interconnected public spaces. It was an arrangement that offered more than a single oppressive object, which is what the Palace of the Soviets became later. The heart of Iofan's project at this stage was an expansive square that he could present as a democratic space. He drew a bird's-eye view of the scheme himself, underscoring the importance that the setting had for him.

In the event, Molotov's advisory committee announced that 'the monumentality, simplicity, integrity and refinement of architectural design required to reflect the great process of our construction of

socialism were not fully satisfied in any one of the proposals submitted'.¹³ Most of the prizes were awarded to Russians. There were three joint first prizes, making it clear that at least one further round of competition would be needed: they went to Iofan, Zholtovsky and Hector Hamilton, a British-born architect based in the US. Hamilton's design was recognizably American art deco, while Zholtovsky's paid tribute to the Colosseum.

With Tolstoy on the advisory committee, these results should have come as no surprise. But they were greeted with outrage by many in the West, who saw the decision not to give Le Corbusier any kind of prize as an insult. Nikolai Kolli, Le Corbusier's collaborator in Moscow and one of the technical advisers to the competition, wrote to his friend and associate to explain what had happened: 'No attempt was made to understand your project. Instead they vainly sought a new monumentality and failed to perceive it in the very essence of your designs. You were accused of having furnished a mere skeleton, devoid of flesh and muscle, rather than monumental architecture. Viktor Vesnin and I tried to explain the broad lines of what you had achieved and there was shouting!'¹⁴

Le Corbusier was furious. He appealed to Anatoly Lunacharsky, the former culture minister who had brought him the bad news in person, and wrote a barrage of letters including one to Lunacharsky that was 1,500 words long. He offered to come to Moscow to explain his ideas more fully and even to discuss working with Zholtovsky, under the mistaken impression that he would be building the palace.

But the worldly and cultured Lunacharsky had less influence with Stalin than Le Corbusier assumed. He passed the correspondence on to the construction committee and then declared his public support for Iofan, observing: 'The building is grandiose but very light.' Iofan, Lunacharsky said, had provided 'everything that could be demanded from our first great architectural monument', while Le Corbusier had designed something reminiscent of 'a strange machine towering over Moscow, some enormous naked structure whose purpose would not be easily comprehensible and that supported a very plain building – something like a hangar for oversized zeppelins'.¹⁵

Le Corbusier's allies did make a futile attempt at lobbying Stalin to persuade him to change his mind. They claimed to believe that the decision was an aberration on the part of minor functionaries, an error that Stalin would naturally reverse when he learned of it. There were other interpretations of what had happened. Oscar Stonorov, an American architect who had won a second prize in the open international competition and would later edit Le Corbusier's complete works, was convinced that Albert Kahn – whom he called 'God-engineer and pig-architect to the Soviets'¹⁶ – had sabotaged Le Corbusier's chances by working to turn the Soviet bureaucracy against him. The Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM – the modern movement's driving force, in which Le Corbusier was a leading figure) sent a lengthy telegram to Stalin suggesting that the result had 'doomed the objectives of the USSR to a miserably mediocre retrograde and decadent end' that constituted 'an insult to world revolution...in the very heart of the Soviet Union, the resurrected cadaver of secular autocracies has betrayed the grandiose venture of the five-year plan with criminal thoughtlessness'.¹⁷ They threatened to abandon plans to hold their next congress in Moscow unless Stalin listened to their protests. And indeed, CIAM never went to Moscow; instead, its meeting to discuss the future of urban planning was held on board the Greek ship *SS Patris II* as it cruised around the Mediterranean.

What none of the foreign competitors or their supporters had understood was that the real purpose of the Palace of the Soviets was to create the heart of a new religion. Lenin was Christ; Marx and Engels were between them John the Baptist; and Stalin, with conspicuously false modesty, presented himself as St Peter. His plan was to create a series of monuments that would put Moscow at the heart of a new cult. It had Lenin's tomb in the role of the black cube at the heart of Mecca. The Palace of the Soviets would have been the focus of secular worship after the pilgrims had paid their personal respects at the tomb. Given this role, its design had to offer a model for an architectural style that the cult could use for all sacred buildings throughout its territories – which is indeed what happened after the Second World War. Nor could the foreigners have known that, in the private minutes of the committee meetings (which established the competitions and the Construction Council, and appointed Iofan), it was always

envisaged that Iofan would be entitled to use any ideas submitted in the competition to inform his own work.

In the third stage of the competition, which ran from March to June 1932, Iofan and Zholtovsky, two of the Soviet prize-winners from the second round, were invited to take part along with Anatoli Zhukov, Dmitry Chechulin, Ilya Golosov, Alabyan, Ginzburg, Ladovsky, Shchuko and Gelfreikh, and the Vesnin brothers. They were given new guidance about how to approach the project:

Without predetermining a particular style, the Council for the Construction of the Palace of the Soviets is of the opinion that the quest should be directed towards the use of both new techniques and the best techniques found in classical architecture while at the same time relying on the achievements of modern architectural technology.¹⁸

And about the brief:

The Palace of the Soviets must be a single, monolithic complex. The combination of the main halls into one single hall will not be permitted. Access to the main halls for mass demonstrations is not required. The palace must be located in an open space; enclosure by colonnades or other buildings which destroy the impression of openness is not permitted. The tendency in many of the designs towards low, squat buildings should be avoided by the use of bold elevated constructions. These should be crowned with further structures which must, however, avoid the suggestion of ecclesiastical motifs.¹⁹

Iofan explored the idea of making the domed roof of the Great Hall visible on the exterior of the palace, rather than hiding it behind a curtain wall. His drawings show that it would have borne a resemblance to the Great Hall designed by Albert Speer for Berlin in 1938. Speer's design was planned for as many as 180,000 of the loyal masses – many of them standing – but at 920 feet, it would not have been as tall as Iofan's Great Hall. Iofan's eventual submission showed both halls contained in a single volume made up of three concentric tiers with the figure of the worker, still modestly scaled, positioned on the edge of the top tier.

Even at this third stage of the competition – before there was a definite design and long before construction began – the palace had already become a fixture in the Soviet imagination. The Bolshoi commissioned Dmitry Shostakovich to compose a major choral work to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the revolution. Aleksei Tolstoy wrote the libretto, entitled *Orango*. It was never performed, but included the stage direction: 'The grandiose outline of the Palace of Soviets at the back of the stage is a staircase. On it, against the background of the glow from the city lights, stand the figures of creatures; through the glass wall of the palace amphitheatres of people can be seen.'²⁰

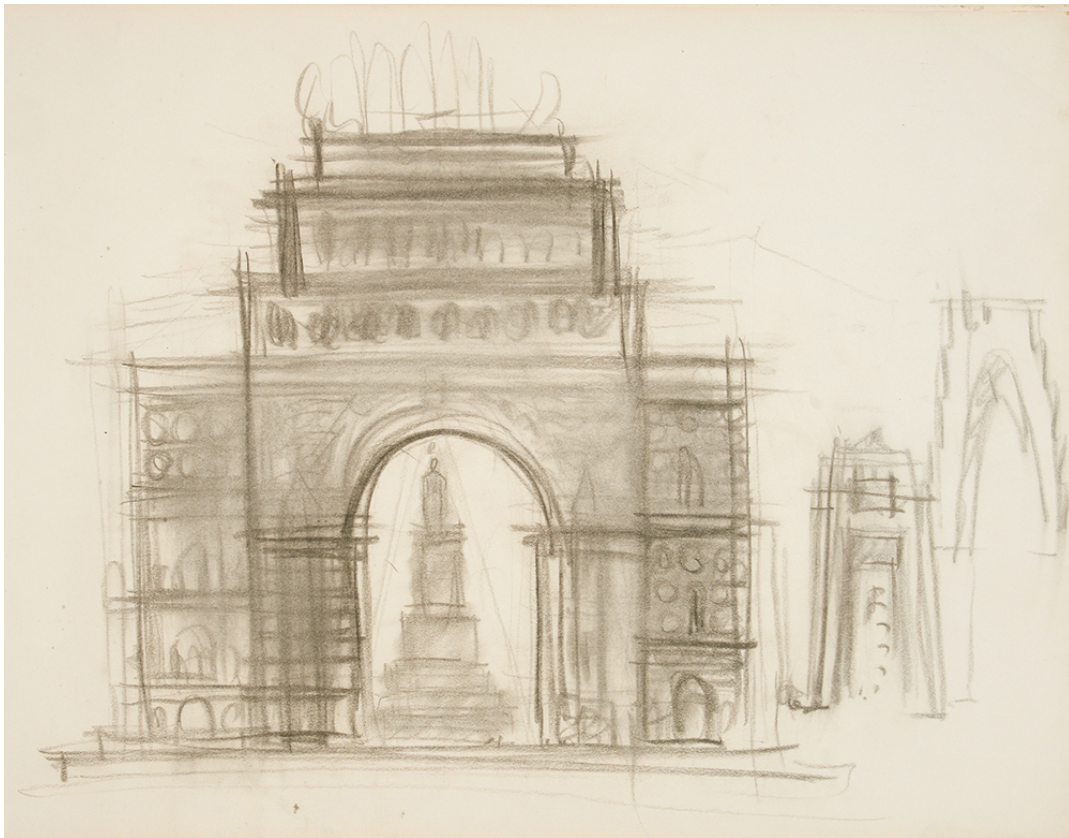
Stalin had left Moscow for a summer break at the end of June 1932, placing Kaganovich in charge. There could be no question of a decision being taken on the design of the palace without him, so Yenukidze was dispatched to the Black Sea with a portfolio full of the key drawings and spent a day explaining them to Stalin. Afterwards Stalin telegraphed Voroshilov, Kaganovich and Molotov on 7 August 1932:

Of all the plans for the Palace of the Soviets, Iofan's is the best. Zholtovsky's project smacks of Noah's ark. Shchusev's is just another Cathedral of Christ the Saviour but without the cross ('so far'). It is possible that Shchusev hopes to 'add on' the cross later. We should (in my opinion) require Iofan:

a) not to separate the small hall from the large one, but to combine them in accordance with the government's brief

b) to give the top of the 'palace' a shape by extending it upwards to form a tall column. (I mean a column of the same shape that Iofan had in his first project)

- c) to place above the column a hammer and sickle that will be electrically lit from within
- d) if for technical reasons the column cannot be hoisted on top of the palace, to place the column next to (near) the palace, if possible, as tall as the Eiffel Tower, or a little taller
- e) to place three statues of Marx, Engels and Lenin in front of the palace.²¹



Plans were prepared to move the Pushkin Museum out of the way to accommodate the Palace of the Soviets. Integrating the palace with Moscow's urban fabric increasingly exercised Iofan. In his sketchbook, he explored the creation of an appropriate setting that related the scale of the tower to the city.

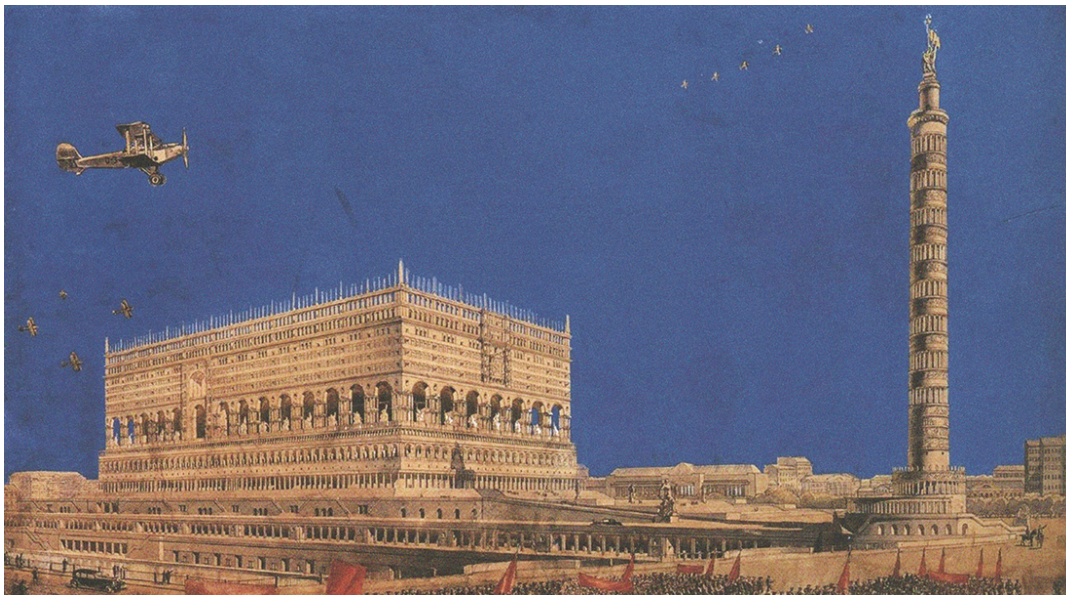
Despite this unmistakable direction, there was still yet another round of the competition to go. Five teams went forward in a fourth stage run between August 1932 and February 1933. At the end of April, the Politburo finally adopted a resolution to approve Iofan's design – or, more accurately, Stalin announced his decision that Iofan would be the architect of the palace, but still insisted on radical changes. Iofan was instructed to substitute a representation of Lenin for the figure of the worker, and to make it at least 150 and perhaps 250 feet high. The commission's resolution also suggested that other architects might be asked to work on the project alongside Iofan. On 4 June, Iofan was officially informed that he would work with Shchuko and Gelfreikh on the project.

Iofan was appointed chief architect of the palace and first deputy chief of construction; Shchuko was deputy chief architect, with rights of co-authorship. They were given six months to work together to finish the design, with a deadline for delivering the working drawings by the first of May 1934. In the official record, other members of Iofan's team are named as Arkady Baransky, Dmitry Tsiperovich, Pyotr Mitkovitzer, Semyon Gelfeld and Dmitry Iofan. Olga Iofan is also listed and features in many photographs of the studio at the time. Molotov expected Iofan, Shchuko and Gelfreikh to collaborate on devising a compromise version of both their ideas that would please Stalin. Since Shchuko and Gelfreikh's entry for the competition had taken the form of a gigantic version of the Doge's Palace in Venice, this was not going to be easy.

Ostensibly, Shchuko and Gelfreikh had been added to Iofan's team to bring construction experience to the project. But it has been argued that it was Shchuko's skill in image-making, acquired through his

work as a theatrical set designer, that appealed to Stalin's instincts as a propagandist. Shchuko might not have known precisely how to build a gigantic, super-tall palace, but he knew how to turn the idea of the tower into a compelling image that mattered to the single most important member of the audience. While Iofan's presentation drawings for the project had been in his usual monochrome charcoal, Shchuko and Gelfreikh's arresting submission had shown the palace in colour against the backdrop of a vivid blue sky and the Moscow cityscape. It had the feel of a poster for an event that had already happened.

Iofan had very different views from his new partners about how to interpret Stalin's instructions. He fought against piling all the elements on top of one another and placing Lenin in a central position atop the two halls. But Shchuko and Gelfreikh showed considerable political skill in reworking the design during weeks of lobbying in the hope of attracting Stalin's attention; and if they did not actually displace Iofan altogether, they at least made the project more their own. Among other things, they pushed hard for a rectangular shape. Iofan later tried, not so subtly, to undermine them by suggesting that they had been influenced by America. There were other prolonged disputes between them. One night as they argued about the design Shchuko vented his frustration with Iofan in front of Olga, prompting the normally mild-mannered Iofan to seize Shchuko by the tie and demand an apology.



When Shchuko and Gelfreikh took part in an earlier round of the competition on their own, they used the model of the Doge's Palace in Venice, inflated to a vast scale. They did not win, but their presentation (above) got them noticed, and set off their campaign to have themselves appointed to Iofan's team.

This was not the first time Shchuko and Gelfreikh had succeeded in overturning the decision of a jury in an architectural competition. Kaganovich had overruled the jury to give them the Lenin Library, and in 1930 they had also snatched a commission to build a theatre in Rostov-on-Don from Grigory Barkhin. After the competition went against them, they had set up shop in Rostov and, working tirelessly, successfully lobbied local officials to displace Barkhin. Their design, which took the shape of a giant tractor, was actually built, although its acoustic qualities left much to be desired and it was later destroyed by invading German forces.

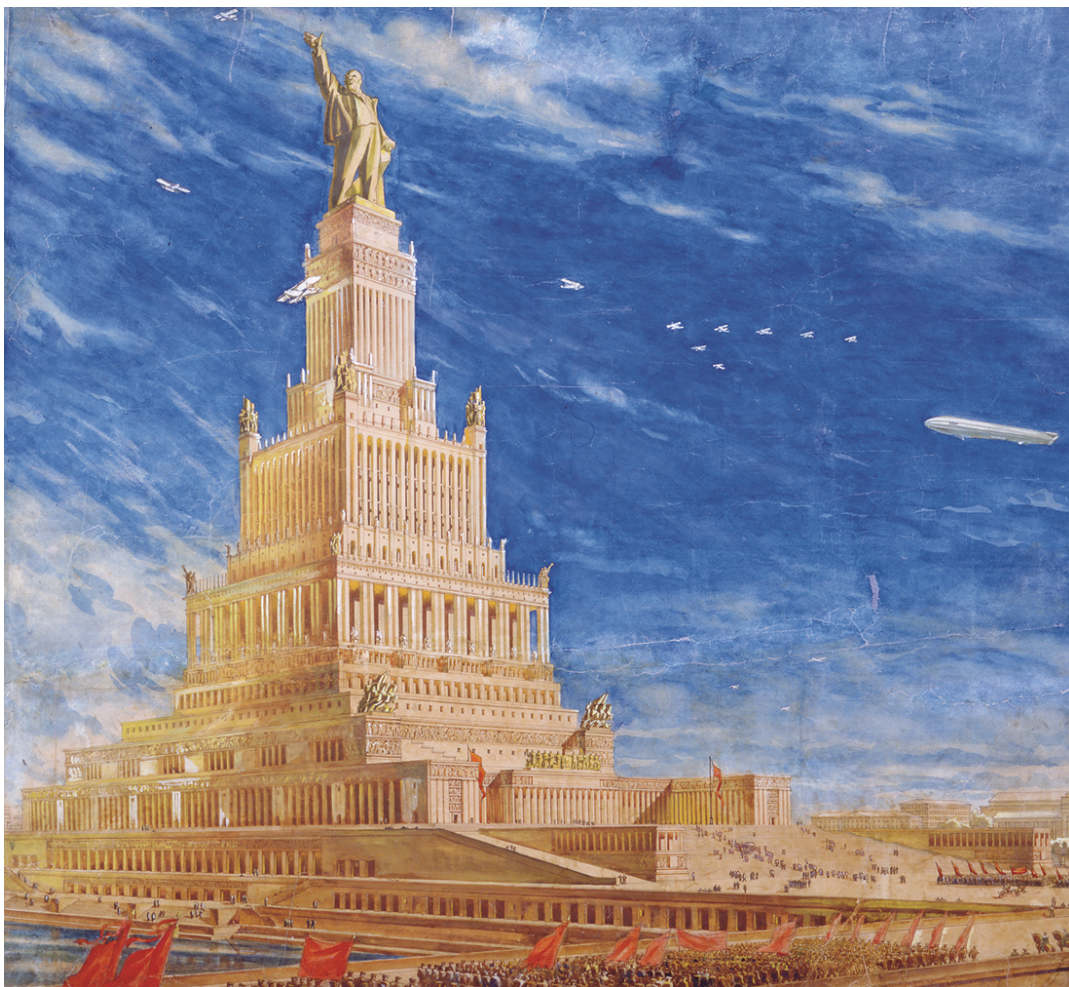
Shchuko and Gelfreikh left Moscow and continued to work on the project in their own studio in Leningrad, without showing Iofan what they were doing. Taking the Lighthouse of Alexandria as their starting point, they developed a number of variations: first putting the statue on top of a square base, as Iofan had done; then on a round one; then on alternating round and square bands. Their strategy was to look for clues in the Construction Council's verdicts for what would appeal to Stalin and to deliver an exaggerated response. The request was for a figure of Lenin at least 160 feet high, so Shchuko and Gelfreikh doubled it to 325 feet. Lenin's extended index finger would be 14 feet long. That summer

Shchuko moved to the Black Sea, taking the project with him, and lobbied Maksim Gorky to endorse his version of the design. Gorky called Stalin, expressing his support for their work.

Shchuko and Gelfreikh were invited to present the scheme in person, ahead of the delivery deadline and without Iofan. Stalin supposedly said of Iofan's design with a square base: 'This is not our architecture! But this,' he nodded at the round base variant, 'we will build!' He is said to have smiled slyly, and said of his choice: 'So that they' – meaning Iofan and his team – 'are not offended.'²²

Both teams of architects were invited to the Kremlin for the announcement of the final outcome of the competition. In Stalin's reception room, Molotov is said to have taken Iofan aside and asked him, 'How could you, as the main architect, approve this project?'

It is likely that at this point Iofan had only very recently seen the latest version of the proposal. He knew, however, that putting a 325-foot statue on top of a 21,000-seat auditorium and more than doubling the height of the building would require the use of a steel structure – which would be beyond the limits of Soviet expertise – rather than the more manageable choice of reinforced concrete. He was shocked, but swiftly made the decision to accept what had been forced on him and claim it as his own. This, although it was over in moments, was a choice that changed the course of Iofan's life. He took on the role of the public face of the palace while doing what he could to tone down the design, and his reward was to get twice as much space in *Pravda's* coverage as either of his collaborators. His continual praise of Stalin and acceptance of Stalin's advice on the design of the building began to sound less like a ritual duty and more like a realistic apportionment of responsibility – or even blame – for the outcome.



Once Shchuko and Gelfreikh had been imposed on Iofan in June 1933, they attempted to make their mark on his design for the palace. They wanted a square tower, not a circular one, and went ahead producing colourful and seductive images, such as this one from the summer of 1933, calculated to appeal to Stalin.

Natalia Rykova remembered visiting Iofan with her father only once. It seems that after leaving Stalin's office with orders to make the palace the tallest building in the world, Iofan immediately telephoned Rykov to ask for help. Rykov went to the House on the Embankment at once, taking his daughter with him. 'I remember Boris Mikhailovich's studio, with all its windows. He was almost in tears. He had just come from Stalin who had demanded that he inflate the scale of the statue of Lenin crowning the Palace, which, according to Boris Mikhailovich, would violate all proportions.'²³

As Iofan later told his nephew, his working relationship with Shchuko and Gelfreikh was 'never a natural one'; the uncomfortable shotgun wedding between their competing visions for the palace had been only the beginning of a long-drawn-out conflict.²⁴ They would also compete against Iofan in the competition to build the Paris pavilion. It was only after Shchuko's death, at the beginning of 1939, that Iofan would be able to resume full control of the design for the Palace of the Soviets. Despite the difficulties between them, however, Iofan would deliver a eulogy at Shchuko's funeral.

So much for Hannes Meyer's version of the Soviet principles of collective work as applied to architecture:

Each architect must submit all his professional output to collective criticism. He must be willing as well to help other members in working out their projects with fraternal and objective advice. The Western principle is professional secrecy inspired by a fear of competition that prevails in private workshops. If the Soviet architect required such 'secrecy' he would automatically eliminate himself from his profession. This collective criticism from colleagues, laymen, workers, future tenants is indispensable and efficient. There is no approval of a project by the authorities until the designer has presented evidence of this public criticism.²⁵

To what extent was Iofan a passive victim of the Palace of the Soviets competition, and to what extent did he himself drive the process? Was he simply accepting Stalin's imaginings, further inflamed by his partners, as the price of retaining his privileges – or even his life? Set against the squalor of daily existence in the Soviet Union as experienced by most citizens, Iofan had a lot to lose. His comfortable home in the House on the Embankment, his privileged travel, transatlantic trips on luxury liners and access to foreign publications would be unlikely to remain if he showed himself to be anything but enthusiastically loyal. It was becoming increasingly clear in 1936 and 1937 that architects were far from exempt from Stalin's purges; all power was in the hands of the dictator and his arbitrary death lists.

And yet there is evidence that some of Stalin's architects were on occasion prepared to take the risk of attempting to change his mind on issues of principle, as Zholtovsky and Shchusev had tried to do with the Sukharev Tower. Even more courageously, Iofan's physicist friend Pyotr Kapitsa had dared to lobby Stalin personally to have his deputy at the Kapitsa Institute released by the secret police (who had charged him with working for the Nazis) and had succeeded in doing so.

Iofan could have refused to modify his designs, and likely would have survived even if he lost the commission. The Vesnins, by contrast with Iofan's mute acceptance of all the state asked of him, maintained a clear independent approach at every stage of the competition. They did not win, but they held onto their architectural reputations.

Iofan, however, seems to have been driven by the eternal instinct of an architect to build at any cost. His experiences in Rome had certainly equipped him with a taste for the stronger architectural flavours demanded by Stalin; his teachers had discussed with him the ideas on which Rome's massive Victor Emmanuel monument was based. And first-hand experience of his former employer Armando Brasini's feverish cinematic work would have equipped him to accept the possibility of monumentalism. In Imperial Russia, there had been a continuing argument between those who identified with a national Russian style – most recently exemplified by the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour – and the modernizers who embraced classicism, seen in St Petersburg as representing a more modern future. Iofan's sympathies then had clearly been with the classicists, and he now took their work as a basis for what he presented as the new language of architectural Stalinism.

The images for the Palace of the Soviets attributed to Iofan, Shchuko and Gelfreikh reflect elements of Iofan's earlier schemes extruded to such improbable extremes as to be almost unrecognizable. The architectural detail is his. The graphic technique used to present it is Shchuko's, but the spirit is a close reflection of Brasini, whose own proposal for the Palace had included a figure of Lenin.

Stalin took the opportunity to point the project out to Walter Duranty, the sycophantic British-born *New York Times* correspondent, on Christmas Day (for the Roman calendar at least) in 1933, when he gave him an interview shortly after the USA had finally granted the USSR diplomatic recognition. Duranty, starstruck by the privilege of an audience with Stalin, described the scene reverentially.

Opposite him there was a life-size portrait of Lenin addressing the Workers, and in a corner under a glass case was a white death mask of Lenin, incredibly calm and impressive. Beside it was a big picture of the Palace of the Soviets that will be built on the site of a downtown cathedral raised to commemorate not the Prince of Peace after which it is named, but Alexander I's victory over Napoleon. Designed by architects Shchuko and Yofan, 'the Palace of the Soviets', Stalin said, 'will be begun next spring'.

Since the Greek colossus that straddled Rhodes harbour was overthrown by an earthquake, the world has known no such vast an effigy of God nor man. Only the Statue of Liberty can compare with it, but Lenin on his tower will outsoar it by more than 1,000 feet.²⁶

The power of the drawings, and the decisions that they had all taken in pursuit of the commission, were one thing – but the realization soon dawned on the team of architects and engineers working in Iofan's Kremlin studio that they really had no idea how to construct it. The palace was a hugely ambitious version of a mixed-use high-rise on a scale that had never been attempted anywhere in the world, let alone in the Soviet Union. Iofan understood that, just as the fledgling Soviet car industry was rooted in expertise imported from Detroit, they needed help from the birthplace of the skyscraper.

Three months after the working drawings deadline had come and gone, Iofan – along with Shchuko, Gelfreikh and two engineers, Jacques Lerner and Vasily Nikolayev – set off for the United States to see how it was done. They took the train to Berlin to collect their visas, because the first US ambassador had only recently arrived in Moscow. From Berlin they went to Paris, where Iofan would return in 1935 and visit Le Corbusier in his studio. In the course of a somewhat awkward conversation, Le Corbusier asked him to intervene on his behalf in order to secure payment of his outstanding fees for the much-delayed Tsentrosyuz project. Le Corbusier noted at the time: 'Iofan has come to meet me here in Paris. He has promised to see about the problem of my fees. You will admit how curious it is that Iofan should be the one to defend my interests in Moscow. But the world is everywhere turned on its head, and nothing ought to surprise us.'²⁷ Back in Moscow later that same year, Iofan wrote assuring Le Corbusier that he would try to help, and the money for the Tsentrosyuz project was eventually paid.

Travelling with diplomatic accreditation, the group left Paris for Dover and then sailed from Southampton to New York on the Cunard liner RMS *Olympic*, arriving in late September 1934. They spent the next three months exploring how Americans built skyscrapers. Their itinerary included visits to Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia and New York that were meant to equip them with the expert knowledge they would need to realize the Palace of the Soviets.

This trip had a profound effect on Iofan, who spent most of it in New York. For him, the impact of America went far beyond the conventional response of a European to the first sight of the jagged New York skyline as their liner docked in lower Manhattan – although he certainly was impressed by that: 'The first impression the skyscrapers make when you approach New York by steamer is truly unforgettable. Their immensity is simply stunning, a fantastic mountain range with peaks in the shape of geometric forms rising out of the water. It is hard to believe that this ridge was created by human hands.'²⁸

In *Pravda* on 15 March 1935, Iofan wrote that 'wherever I might travel, whatever I might see, I approach everything from a particular point of view – what of all this has to be taken home to the Soviet

Union’.²⁹ In Washington he was moved by the Lincoln Memorial, designed by Henry Bacon. He was also enthusiastic about Paul Philippe Cret’s Folger Shakespeare Library, a refined white marble exercise in classical reduction, curiously equipped with a Tudor interior at the donor’s insistence. The French-born, Philadelphia-based Cret had completed the project only two years before Iofan’s visit, and it reinforced Iofan’s conviction that the most appropriate direction for contemporary architecture was a synthesis of classical structure with minimal ornamental detail.

Iofan was less impressed by the rest of Washington. The city gave him a chance to provide a political commentary on what he saw: ‘These soulless copies fail to evoke the solemnity and monumentality to which they aspire. Overall the architecture of US government buildings is a monumental decoration aimed at persuading the ordinary American of the permanence of the existing political order.’³⁰ This, of course, was a charge that could also have been made against Iofan’s own plans for Moscow.

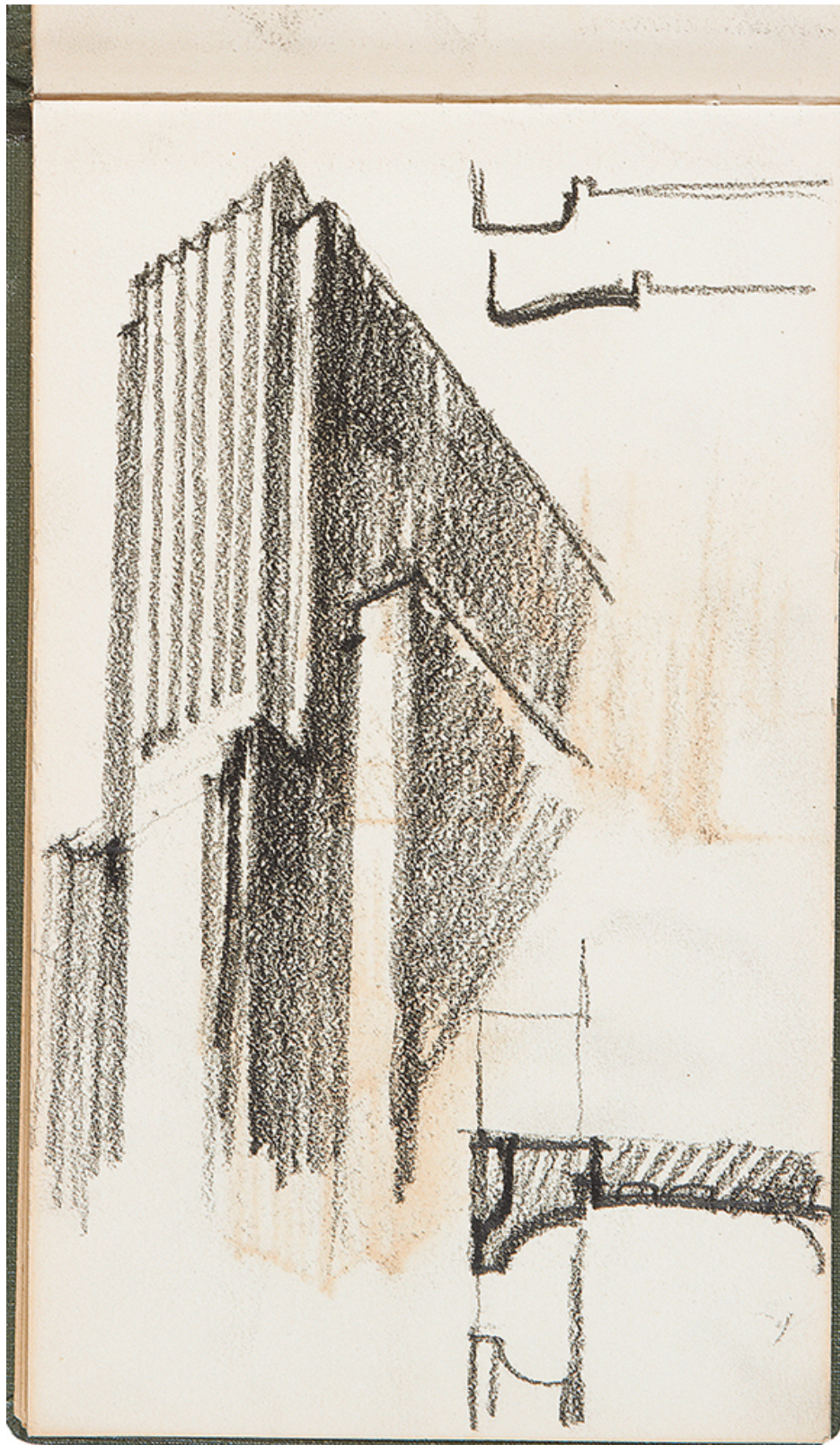
Despite these politically based reservations, Iofan was swept away by how American architects worked. He described them in terms that prefigure Ayn Rand’s words in *The Fountainhead*: ‘The American architect is distinguished by remarkable energy, he is enterprising, practical and efficient. He shows great initiative, boldly casting aside obsolete notions when making technical decisions and displaying great ingenuity in dealing with matters of everyday comfort.’³¹

Vyacheslav Oltarzhevsky, who had been practising in America since 1924, introduced Iofan to the team that was building Rockefeller Center. The speed with which it was being constructed amazed the three visiting Soviet architects. ‘Before our very eyes, in the course of two months some twenty floors of the skyscraper were constructed,’ wrote Iofan.³² As he noted, it took just 136 days to build the Center’s International Building. Oltarzhevsky took the group to see Radio City Music Hall, completed since Wallace Harrison and Rothafel’s own fact-finding visit to Moscow three years earlier. ‘The commission observed and listened to the voices of artists on stage who were singing in a normal tone of voice and checked to see how well their voices could be heard in various parts of the hall. The results were extraordinary.’³³

Vladimir Shchuko was equally impressed by his ride to the top of the RCA Building, which he called ‘one of the truly remarkable miracles of contemporary American technology. The elevators with dizzying speed...carry you to the very top floor to a wonderful restaurant and café from which you can exit directly onto the roof of the skyscraper. Here there are flowers, benches and chairs for relaxing. And, from a height of 400 metres, one is afforded an amazing view of the gigantic city. The spectacle is especially effective at night when the city is ablaze in a sea of different coloured lights.’³⁴

Iofan went to see the engineering firm Moran & Proctor in New York, seeking detailed advice about the massive steel structure that the Palace of the Soviets would require. It was not just American efficiency that impressed him: as his sketches of Rockefeller Center show, he was fascinated by what he saw as the American ability to make architecture on an urban scale and to give underlying classical principles a modern expression. The firm later sent one of its partners to Moscow to advise on the excavation of the palace foundations.

Rockefeller Center was not the only American building he studied closely. After meeting Frank Lloyd Wright he was introduced to Ralph Thomas Walker, whose thirty-two-storey headquarters building for the New York Telephone Company on West Street in lower Manhattan, completed in 1926, is often described as the first art deco skyscraper. Its use of expressed cast stone piers to unify a complex form reflects what Iofan would later attempt to do with the Palace of the Soviets. The narrative decorative scheme of its interiors would also provide him with useful material for designing the interiors of the palace in Moscow. The marble lobby of the New York building was decorated with bronze medallions and ceiling murals that reflected its purpose: a female telephone operator and a linesman in bronze, and painted representations of the history of communication throughout the Americas, beginning with pre-Columbian Aztec runners. In a similar vein, Iofan’s ideas for the Palace of the Soviets would make use of a complex narrative theme expressed through images of Red Army soldiers, partisans and champions of labour carried out in sculpture, murals and mosaics.



Iofan, Shchuko and Gelfreikh, along with two of their engineers, went on a fact-finding mission to explore American building techniques in 1934.



Iofan's sketches reflect the impact it had on his ideas.

Iofan would have seen Walker's recently completed Irving Trust Building, a fifty-storey limestone-clad tower on Wall Street whose form would also be reflected in Iofan's subsequent competition entries. He met Walker as well as the noted planner Clarence Stein, chairman of the American Russian Institute's architectural committee, at an afternoon reception of the Architectural League of New York, where his hosts praised the Palace of the Soviets as 'thrilling and imagination-stirring'.³⁵ After the war, the Institute would be listed by the office of the US Attorney General as a communist front organization.

Perhaps the most intriguing American influence on Iofan's imagination was Harvey Wiley Corbett, a beaux-arts American architect who had been speculating about multi-tiered skyscraper cities since before the First World War. Corbett was a member of the team that designed Rockefeller Center, and friendly enough with Oltarzhevsky to write a foreword to a book of the Russian's exquisite drawings that was published in America just before his return home. In a deliberate attempt to outdo the Empire State Building, Corbett had designed a 100-storey tower for Metropolitan Life on Madison Avenue. The widely published design for the tower took the form of a sequence of ever more slender concentric sections stacked on top of one another. In some renderings the sections were made to look rectangular and in others they were shown as cylinders, offering a precise model for the Palace of the Soviets. The scheme got approval, but construction was halted on floor 29 at the depth of the Great Depression in 1933. Given the connection with Oltarzhevsky and with Rockefeller Center, which Iofan admired so much, it is highly likely that Iofan would have been introduced to Corbett and seen his drawings.

On his return home at the end of 1934, Iofan presented a report to the Construction Council for the palace in which he praised the 'simple, precise and rational organization of construction in America'.³⁶ He had noted that American building sites had far fewer construction workers than Soviet ones, thanks to far more use of prefabrication. They were more mechanized and they relied less on scaffolding,

making the building process easier and less cluttered. Iofan and Karo Alabyan discussed the possibility of an exhibition of American architecture in the Soviet Union. But in Moscow – with nothing to see of the palace above the high fence that ringed the entire site – the troubled history of Iofan's building of the House on the Embankment seemed to be repeating itself.

Iofan described the decision to emphasize the external vertical piers of the Palace of the Soviets as 'inspired by' his visit to America.³⁷ The RCA Building can be seen as an influence not just in the Soviet pavilions designed for Paris in 1937 and New York in 1939, but also in the much larger projects on which he worked between 1937 and 1940 in competitions for the Ministry of Heavy Industry, the Foreign Ministry and *Izvestiya's* offices. However, he would have been aware that not all Americans were impressed by his work. The month before he arrived in America, the architectural magazine *Pencil Points* had carried an acid commentary by H. Van Buren Magonigle:

[W]e have the word of Professor Isadore Rosenfeld of New York University that [Iofan] has 'become one of the most acclaimed architects of our time'....As a test of the resonance of the acclaim, I have asked a number of up-and-coming up-to-the-minute architects to name the architect of the Palace of the Soviets, and found them as uninformed as I had been. I accuse the propaganda agencies of the Soviet Union of gross inefficiency in this matter.³⁸

Magonigle continued by suggesting that the Palace of the Soviets 'closely resembles one of those creations of the pastry cook so familiar to us'.³⁹ Given that Oltarzhevsky – or Oltar-Jevsky, as he styled himself in America – had a piece published in the same issue, Iofan would certainly have been aware of the jibes.

It was this realization that not everybody accepted that the palace would be the greatest building on Earth that prompted Iofan to respond to the criticisms about its supposedly negative impact on Moscow. He insisted that, to the contrary:

The stepped shape of the palace gives it lightness and largeness of scale and, in spite of its enormous size, does not oppress the viewer with its volumes but soars upwards. The entire top part of the building is decorated with pronounced vertical articulations. There are no horizontal string courses because we wanted to avoid disrupting the way in which the building soars upwards. But at the same time, the setbacks ensure that these horizontal articulations are clearly felt, without halting the building's dynamic upward growth.

The approach that we adopted employed powerful pylons as the basis of the structure. We tried to create a roof that would seem like an architectural sky, so to speak, something utterly light and not oppressive. The roof has no structural load of any kind and so should not express the idea of heaviness.⁴⁰

This was a theme to which Iofan returned more than once as he tried to forestall potential criticism of the obvious impact that his enormous structure would have on the historic heart of Moscow.



Though he compared the form that the palace took to a fully extended telescope, Iofan (centre, bent over tower) accepted Shchuko and Gelfreikh's (possibly at left and right, standing) transformation of the design as his own work as they continued to refine the famous image of the tower in the early months of 1934.

It seems to me that there is no need to be afraid that the Palace of the Soviets will, so to speak, kill the Kremlin. We know of architectural ensembles that may not have been conceived in accordance with a single overall idea, but in which there is an opposition between an enormous high volume on the one hand, and a succession of picturesque buildings on the other. You could not say for instance that St Peter's kills or oppresses the buildings of the Vatican. Another example is the Colosseum and the Forum, where, on the one hand we have an enormous volume, the Colosseum – very understated, very well integrated, and very pronounced – and on the other, the picturesque complex of the Forum. These are ensembles based on contrasts.⁴¹

Behind Iofan's tweed suit was Stalin's armed might. Work on the tallest building in the world continued.

The construction of the palace demanded the creation of a huge infrastructure of drawing offices and construction teams. Special factories were set up to manufacture steel components. A dedicated group known as the Office of Artistic Works of the Council of the Palace of the Soviets was established to work on the interiors. It built up an extensive archive of textiles and other materials, including samples of 16th-century Persian textiles, 18th-century French brocade and even Russian Orthodox religious vestments to use for the decoration of the palace's interiors.

But progress on building remained painfully slow. In part, this was because of continuing uncertainty about the building's architectural identity. Iofan discussed new changes to the design and suggested that the last word went, as always, to Stalin.

In 1935 after we three returned from the USA, part of our collective decided – under the influence of America, it would seem – to once again in earnest move to a rectangular solution of the skyscraper type.

In the draft project, the high-rise section was conceived in the form of five main steps and two supplemental ones. Clearly this seemed to overcomplicate the silhouette. There was a desire to make the Palace of the Soviets more monumental and laconic, so that it would have a shape and a silhouette that was easily memorable. The general view was that this was required, but there was disagreement as to whether to have three or four basic cylinders.

Comrade Stalin heard us out and proposed that we work up a final project with three levels, this being the most laconic, clear-cut solution.⁴²



Iofan in the fedora, with Andrei Prokofiev (left), leader of the construction team, inspecting work on the foundations of the palace in 1938, with the president of the Supreme Soviet, Mikhail Kalinin (centre).



The Palace of the Soviets reached its maximum height in the 1939 version.

The reality behind this gloss was jarringly different. A letter in Vyacheslav Molotov's files dating from 1938 – sent to him by Antonina Baturina, an Old Bolshevik and a party member since 1906 – suggests a project on the edge of fiasco. With insights from her son, an artist working for Iofan, she portrays creative stalemate and a dysfunctional team too terrified to admit it.

I am close to the youth of the Komsomol [a Leninist youth organization]...for some reason they hesitate to report to you as the chairman of the commission for the construction of the Palace of Soviets that they are at a dead end....The project of the architect Iofan was accepted in principle, but the final design of the project had to take place through the joint work of the appointed expert commission, the author Iofan and his two assistants, Gelfreikh and Shchuko.

The expert commission has turned out to be unviable. Iofan, Gelfreikh and Shchuko have taken its work on themselves, and the creative study has been shouldered by a group of young architects. They are horrified by the responsibility that has been entrusted to them. They support Comrade Iofan, and they sit drawing endlessly for days. But he offers them no guidance and no direction, just vague remarks. 'It won't do, it's still weak, it still needs more work...' It's brought them to despair. They worry that the whole venture will end with them being locked up by the NKVD...And as time has passed, they have discovered defect after defect.⁴³

She goes on to point out the impossibility of creating such a colossal building in so short a period of time, noting that 'the Pantheon took fifty years to build'. She suggests that the engineers have calculated that the palace will use as much electricity as is required for the whole of Moscow. She predicts that 'in

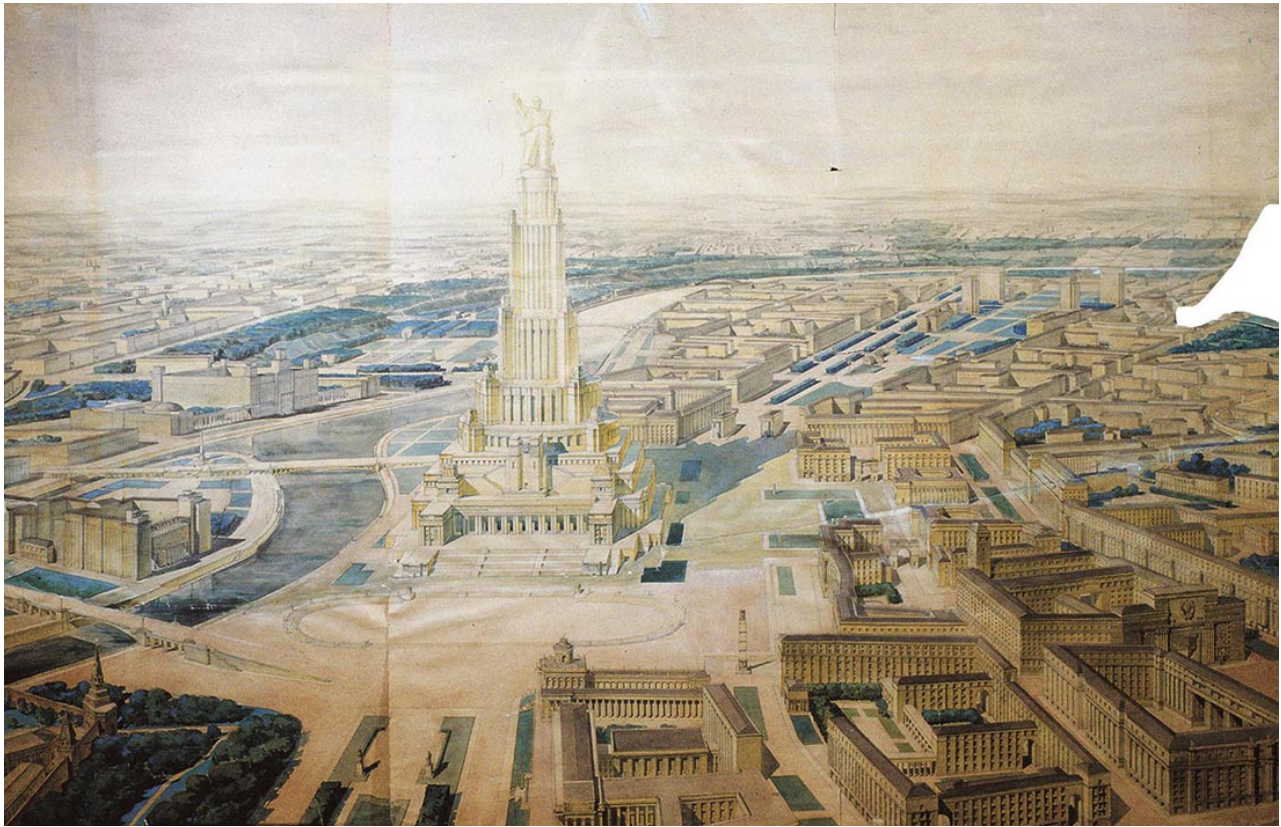
winter Lenin's hand will freeze up. The icicles, which will fall just at the entrance to the palace, will threaten visitors with serious injury.⁴⁴

Could Iofan be accused of opportunism? He had joined the Communist Party out of conviction, not calculation, but it is certainly true that his career in the Soviet Union was based on a steady stream of official commissions. These came from his close connections with the communist hierarchy in the Soviet Union and his ability to give its members the state buildings that reflected their ideology, as expressed by Lazar Kaganovich and Aleksei Tolstoy.

Every architect's career is based to a greater or lesser extent on the skill with which they perform the survival dance with the rich, the powerful and the famous – this is an essential aspect of the profession. Each depends on the other; the variable is the nature of the balance of power between architect and client. The question is whether the architect's determination to use their client's money and prestige in pursuit of building their vision is more or less effective than the client's urge to glorify themselves – or a questionable regime – at the expense of their architect's reputation. Iofan's reputation as a gifted architect, with a deft talent for making buildings that were neither aggressively avant-garde nor excessively historicist, was overwhelmed by the monstrous scale of the Palace of the Soviets: a condition that was imposed on him, but one that he nevertheless accepted rather than lose the commission.



The Soviet Academy of Architecture endorsed Iofan's taller 1939 design for the palace, but criticized Merkulov's attempts to produce a giant representation of Lenin following Iofan's sketches, shown here.



The 1939 version of the design for the palace. Iofan's House on the Embankment is shown just across the river, with one of the Kremlin's spires.

André Gide, when he returned from the Soviet Union in 1936 having lost his faith in communism, wrote of the palace: 'The Russian worker will know why he starves in front of this 415m-high monument crowned by a statue of Lenin in stainless steel.'⁴⁵ The way in which Iofan's victory in the competition pushed aside Le Corbusier's entry had also damaged him in the eyes of the architectural world. The Swiss modernist critic Siegfried Giedion wrote to Stalin describing the three shortlisted schemes as 'a betrayal of the revolution'.⁴⁶

It was Iofan who designed the process that the Soviet government followed to select a plan for the Palace of the Soviets; he formulated the brief, and eventually he won the competition to build it. But the design for the palace that finally got under way in 1937 bore little resemblance to the measured and sober scheme he had submitted six years earlier. According to Isaak Eigel, 'the height of the Palace of the Soviets went from 250m to 415m with the sole intention of making it the tallest building in the world, transferring the original project into the pedestal of an enormous sculpture of Lenin'.⁴⁷

Iofan himself criticized the extruded height of the project, likening it to a fully extended 'telescope'.⁴⁸ He observed that with this type of decision, architecture itself becomes secondary to the structure. Moreover, he saw the proposal as irrational for the simple reason that the statue would almost always be hidden by clouds. But Stalin told his architects: 'This is a monument to Lenin. Don't be afraid of height. Go for it.'⁴⁹

All that Iofan could do, step by step, was try to make the huge piece of construction that Stalin's instructions demanded into something a little less brutal. With the basic elements fixed, he devoted himself to the task of designing appropriate architectural imagery for the interiors and developing a narrative for the decorative scheme.

Reaching the conference hall would have involved ascending an endless cascade of steps up to an entrance hall fronted by a giant crescent colonnade that suggested the approach to the Victor Emmanuel monument in Rome (which itself is an outsize version of the altar at Pergamon). This would have been

adorned with marble representations of the precursors of socialism, carved in the manner of Michelangelo's Medici tomb. Iofan had seen the altar for himself at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. This base would support the shaft of the tower, dedicated to Marx and Engels. The whole would be crowned by a massive figure of Lenin, who, it was eventually decided, would be portrayed in a cloak-like greatcoat rather than the baggy trousers and jacket combination depicted in early versions of the design. The larger auditorium told the story of the Soviet peoples while the smaller one depicted the character of each of the constituent republics. The main foyer was dedicated to the Stalin constitution. On one side was the foyer of the heroes of the civil war, and on the other were the heroes of the building of socialism. The choice of individual portraits would presumably have been restricted to those heroes who were safely dead before the start of the purges, to avoid later confusion. In the main auditorium, closely modelled on the Pantheon, speakers would have addressed the masses from a huge tribune topped by a cluster of triumphant proletarians carved in marble.

Hitler and Albert Speer talked about 'ruin value' when they planned the rebuilding of Berlin. They were thinking in terms of structures that would be 'timeless' in the sense that one day they might, even as ruins, be as powerful in their impact as they were when new – like the Colosseum in Rome, or the Sphinx in Egypt. But Stalin's sycophants in the Soviet Union, rather than having an eye to its quality as a ruin, claimed of the Palace of the Soviets that 'the centuries will not leave their mark on it; we shall build it so that it stands without ageing eternally'.⁵⁰

Not only did Iofan fail to build what he had designed, he also failed to complete the world's tallest building – which might, if he had succeeded, have been some compensation for giving way to Stalin's interference. The form that the palace took was as much a product of unintended consequences as of deliberate intentions. The part Stalin played in its design has recently been downplayed by Moscow's current chief architect, Sergei Kuznetsov, who has suggested that the Politburo spent little time discussing architectural matters during the 1930s, placing them low on the agenda and more or less rubber-stamping decisions taken by the professionals. But an order from Stalin to build the tallest structure in the world is clearly on record, and that order was turned into a design in the struggle for control of the project between Iofan and Shchuko. And – further underscoring Stalin's fascination with construction – it's clear that an inordinate amount of his correspondence with Lazar Kaganovich was taken up with such apparently arcane details as the shape of the red stars that would replace the Romanov eagles atop the Kremlin in 1935.

In August of that year, for example, the Politburo agreed to the removal of the eagles by 7 November and authorized the use of 30 kg (66 lbs) of gold to manufacture the stars. A week later, Kaganovich telegraphed Stalin: 'Today we saw mock-ups of the stars. They came out very well and look attractive. I am sending you photographs of the mock-ups. Please let me know your opinion, preferably by wire in view of the need to start work.'⁵¹ Given all that, there seems no question but that Iofan had accepted the role of interpreting Stalin's wishes, while Kaganovich made Iofan's designs the template for all Soviet architecture in the Stalin era.



Iofan's years exploring the monuments of Italy gave him first-hand experience of the language of Renaissance sculpture, which he used as the basis of his work in Moscow.



Michelangelo's tomb sculpture for the Medici tomb provided a useful reference for Iofan's representations of Karl Marx and other heroes of socialism that he planned for the base of the Palace of the Soviets.

Before work could start on the palace, engineers had to carry out an extensive site survey to determine ground conditions. Following American advice, more than 100 boreholes were drilled to a depth of as much as 200 feet, until a layer of hard load-bearing limestone, 100 feet deep beneath the surface layers of clay and softer rock, was finally discovered. To pour the concrete foundations in two concentric rings would mean excavating a massive circular pit, over 500 feet in diameter and 100 feet deep. Iofan lined the walls of the pit with bitumen, pumped molten into a ring of 1,800 shafts sunk into the ground to resist the pressure from the highwater table and flooding from the river. It failed to stop the pit from flooding.

Superstitious Muscovites interpreted this setback as a sign of divine displeasure with the sacrilegious destruction of a house of God. Pumps were run continuously to stop the flooding, and an impervious layer of bitumen-coated fibreboard was used to line the entire pit.

But Iofan could never admit that any difficulty existed. In public he blithely asserted:

The Palace of Soviets will be completed on schedule – that is guaranteed. Our great victories are guaranteed by guidance in our work from the Communist Party and its Stalinist Central Committee and the Soviet government. It is guaranteed because in our work we are led on the correct path by the great teacher, the one who carries forward the cause of Lenin – Stalin – and he inspires us in our work through his directives. It is guaranteed because the head of the Soviet government, V. M. Molotov, chairman of the Construction Council of the Palace of Soviets, is directly leading us. It is guaranteed because our Soviet people loves its outstanding Palace, and we the builders, knowing that, are ready to expend all our strength to justify the great honour that this task represents.⁵²

To judge from his notebooks, this was a speech he had written for himself.

Using techniques learned in America, two factories were built to feed the Palace of the Soviets site with materials and components. A plant was set up to manufacture concrete half a mile away. It was delivered by the craneload, four tons at a time, to pour the two massive concrete rings connected by radial walls. The foundations had been completed by the end of 1938 and work then started on the steel structure, for which another factory was built three miles away on the Lenin Hills. Steel parts were fabricated there, holes were drilled for rivets, and then the components were loaded onto lorries and taken to site. A dozen cranes were used to lift the steel into position. As the steelwork rose, the cranes were dismantled and repositioned onto the steel frame.



Though the foundations for the 1939 version of the palace were already in place, when Iofan's team was evacuated during the Second World War it carried out a substantial redesign, which was shown in Moscow on Iofan's return. He was subsequently ordered to reduce the height significantly.

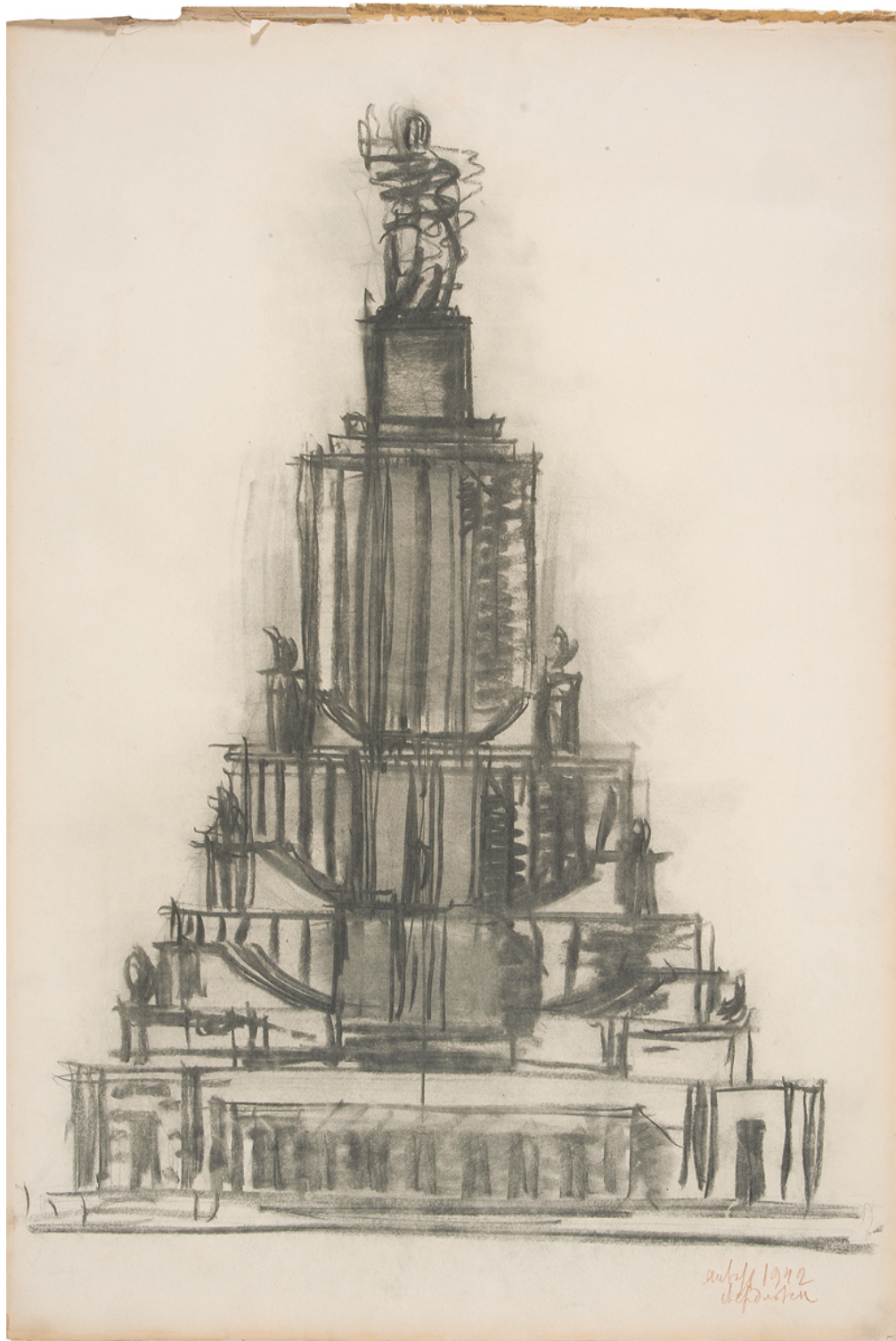
By 1939, the road closures necessary to prepare for moving the Pushkin Museum out of the way had been announced. Preparations were made for jacking it up and mounting it on huge rollers to shift it bodily by 300 feet, so as to clear the whole site. In the summer of that year, the board of the Union of Soviet Architects assembled for a four-day session to explore every aspect of the palace. Iofan, Gelfreikh and Merkulov presented their work to an audience of architects, engineers, critics and artists. It was a remarkable meeting for many reasons, not least for the way in which speaker after speaker

underscored the extent of the project's ambition. Aleksandr Vesnin opened the proceedings by describing the responsibility of all participants in the construction of what he called 'the greatest structure in the history of world architecture'.⁵³ The palace differed from all that had gone before, he said, 'not only in its size, but also in the depth of the idea embedded in it'.⁵⁴ Merkurov described his strategy for modelling the statue of Lenin, which he believed would be visible from a distance of more than 40 miles, and his search for a material to make it from that would last for 1,000 years.

For Iofan, the Palace of the Soviets' importance lay in its significance as, from his point of view, 'the first truly democratic monument in human history'.⁵⁵ He noted the pyramids and temples of the ancient East as the creations of despots. He admired the Acropolis as 'a brilliant example of architecture, imbued with a deep sense of nature and man. However, even these works of antiquity bear the features of class limitations; Athenian democracy developed on the basis of a slave economy'.⁵⁶ Rome was no better from a class point of view: 'The forums, baths and palaces were the centre of social life for the Roman nobility, but for the mass of Roman citizens, not to mention the slaves, they represent only a spectacle, inaccessible, and alien to the people'.⁵⁷ Iofan went on to suggest that in the Middle Ages:

the most monumental and significant buildings were religious cathedrals, the religious mystical idea suppressed the true ideals and images of folk art, although the builders of the cathedrals who came from the people tried, contrary to the dictates of the church, to capture them in architectural and sculptural form.

Whatever era in the history of architecture we take, we will everywhere encounter the same picture: the people are the builders, but do not build for themselves.⁵⁸



In his sketchbooks throughout the later part of the 1930s Iofan continually explored ways of giving the cylindrical form of the palace's tower a more dynamic profile.

What is particularly revealing about Iofan's speech is the absence of any mention of 20th-century architecture. From his earlier work in Moscow, it is clear that for at least some time in his career he had been interested in modernism. He would certainly have seen Le Corbusier's Tsentrosoyuz project in Moscow and his Salvation Army Cité de Refuge in Paris, completed three years before Iofan started travelling to Paris to build the Soviet pavilion.

But in 1939, he had nothing to say about any architect or building more recent than Giacomo Vignola and his Villa Farnese in Caprarola, Italy. The villa was a building Iofan had visited and admired, saying: 'This remarkable work of the Renaissance is, both in appearance and its layout, a real fortress, towering over the city, over neighbouring villages, and as it were threatening them.'⁵⁹

Speaking of the present, Iofan simply charged that:

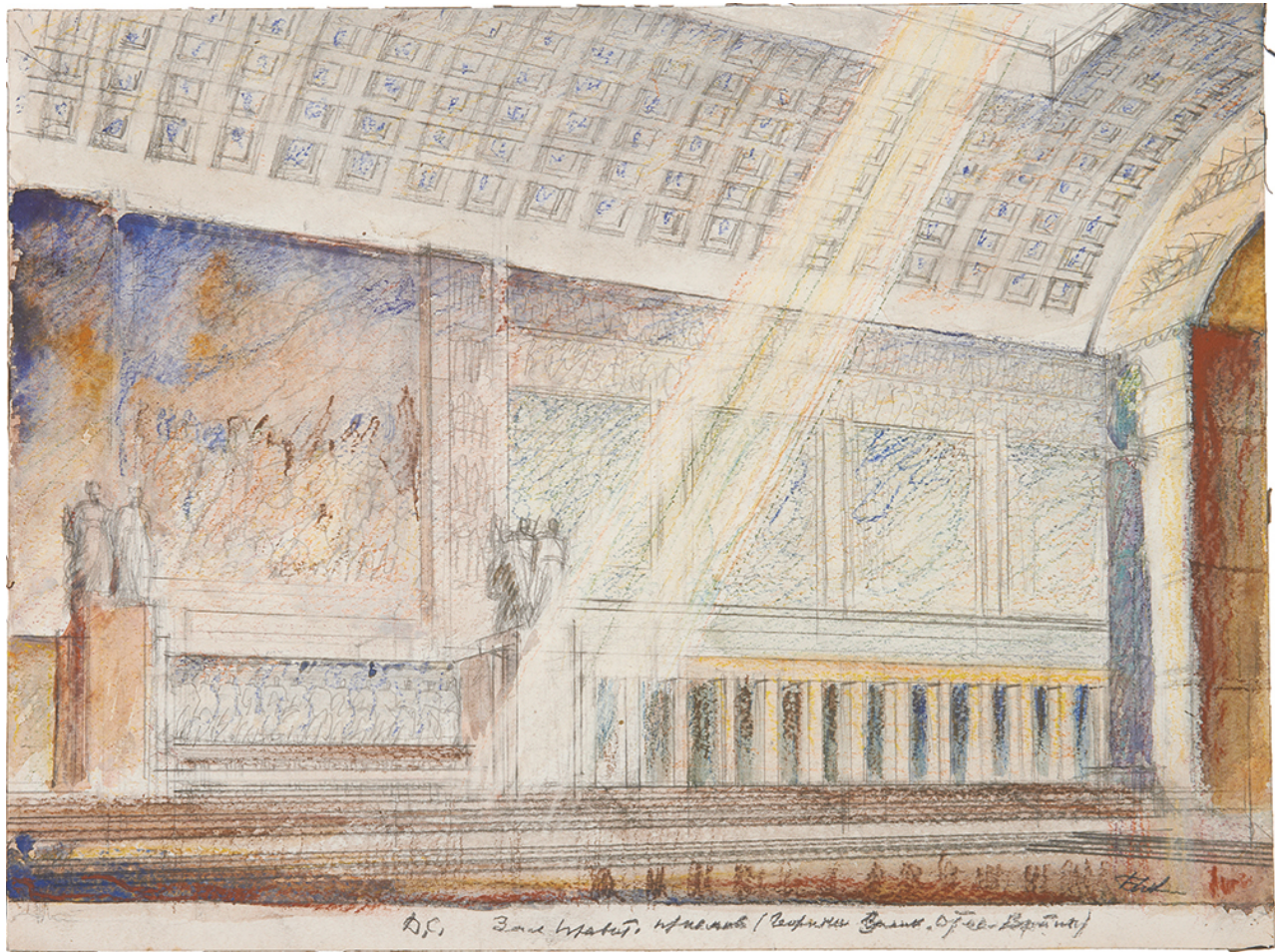
The era of capitalism is marked by a deep decline in monumental architecture; in this era, palaces were still built, but these palace structures have nothing to do with those features of monumentalism that were characteristic of antiquity, the Renaissance and the heyday of architecture. The palaces that the modern money magnates of the capitalist world build for themselves are characterized by the complete absence of architectural ideas, bad taste and outward ostentatious tinsel. A pseudo-monumental character is given to various government buildings of the bourgeois state, parliaments, stock exchanges and banks.⁶⁰

His nostalgia for authentic monumentality mirrors more recent regret at the decline of both religious art and portraiture; in our secular era, Christ is represented not by an artist of the calibre of Leonardo da Vinci but in the mundane, lifeless kitsch images of a bearded Jesus.

Iofan continued: 'Needless to say, these structures are not only alien but directly hostile to the people. Architecture here is intended only to mask the pseudo-democratic character of the bourgeois state, or to openly serve the purposes of capitalist advertising.'⁶¹ By contrast, he saw himself as reclaiming the decadent tradition of monumentalism for the working class: 'In our country, for the first time in the history of mankind, the people are creating a palace for themselves. This palace will directly serve the people, opening wide the doors to the masses on the days of national celebration, revolutionary festivals, social events. In all its architectural appearance, in all its internal structure, decoration, artistic treatment, the palace will talk about the people, their culture, about their power in a country that has thrown off the chains of capitalist slavery.'⁶²



Post-war versions of the scheme for a sequence of domed entrance lobbies ringing the main auditorium.



The iconography now emphasized Soviet victory more than the revolution.

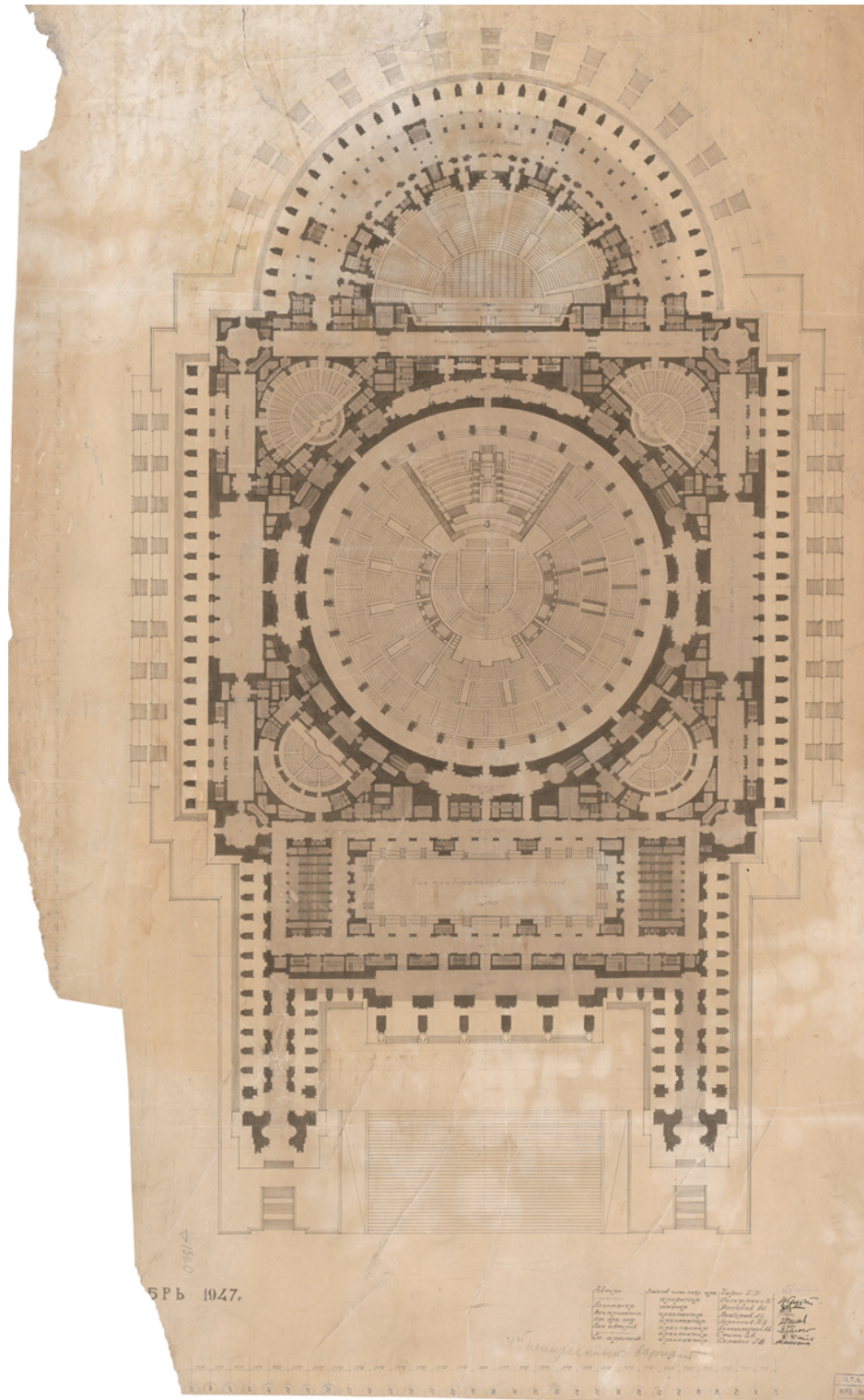
Merkurov, quick to establish his revolutionary credentials by dropping in a mention of having met Lenin in Switzerland, explained in his speech to the session that he had developed his project with a series of clay models at different scales. He had started with a 20-inch maquette, which he used to explore the relationship of his huge sculpture to the building as a whole; he then worked his way through a sequence of models in incrementally larger sizes. Some of the audience described this as resorting to primitive handicraft and urged him instead to follow Iofan in researching more modern technologies.

Merkurov had rejected stainless steel as a material for the giant figure because, he said, ‘it didn’t satisfy me as a sculptor’. He had explored the idea of ‘red’ copper with a silver finish, a combination that he accepted would turn black in Moscow’s polluted air. Then he had adopted the strategy of using a nickel bronze copper, ‘an alloy that does not corrode and welds well, which is not possible with stainless steel’. He cited the roof of New York’s Pennsylvania Station as a precedent: ‘Its roof is nickel bronze, it’s just 0.45cm thick, is already fifty years old, and will last another 150. It’s simple mathematics: we will use 2cm and it will last 1,000 years.’⁶³

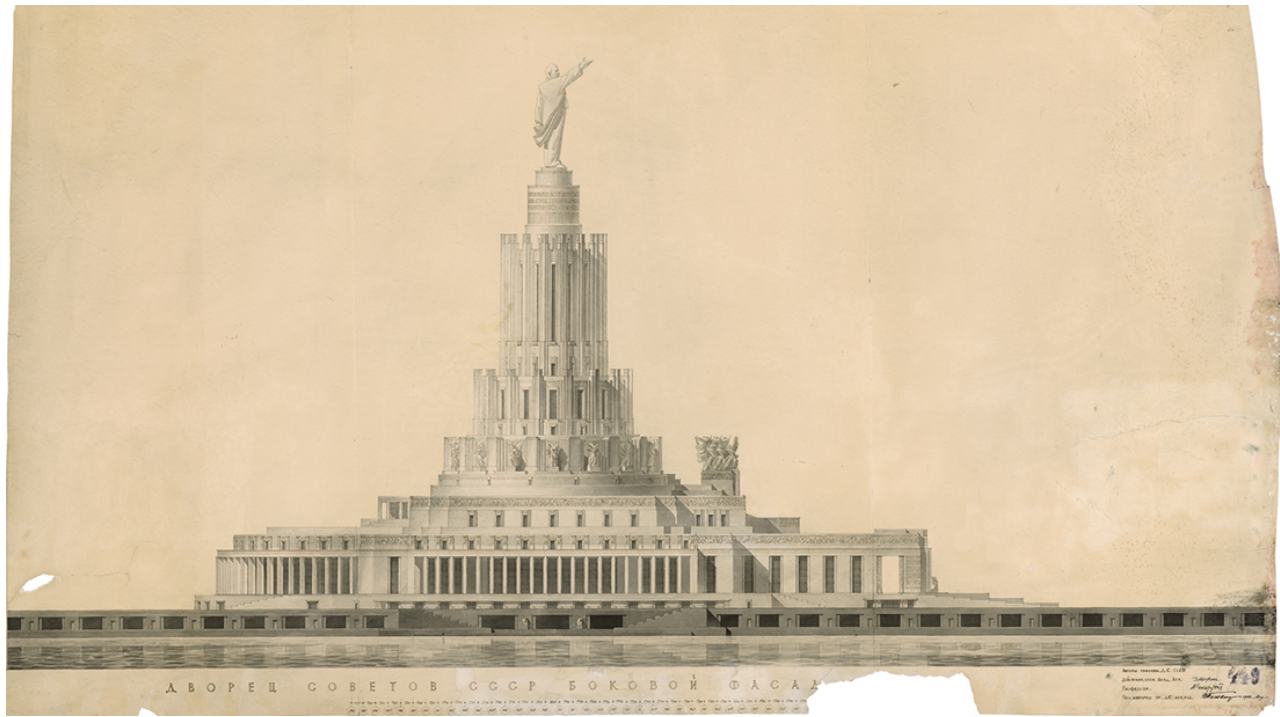
While Iofan’s presentation was generally well received, Merkurov was the subject of much criticism. Nikolai Tomskey commented: ‘The sculpture of Lenin is professionally illiterate. It looks more like a weather vane than a living image of the great Lenin.’⁶⁴ Aleksandr Matveyev pointed out that Lenin as represented by Merkurov had only been considered for its visibility from two directions, rather than the necessary four. Matveyev added that ‘the composition does not meet the basic requirements for monumental sculpture, the figure dressed in baggy, heavy wide trousers, which does not correspond to historical truths. It does not in any way correspond to the popular idea of Lenin. Folk and amateur artists portray him as light, agile and capable of physical labour.’⁶⁵

Igor Grabar, a painter, curator and critic who was close to Stalin, pointed out that ‘the inevitable distortions of perspective are clearly not taken into account here’:

The magnificent architecture ends with sculpture. This architecture is built in such a way that the higher it is, the more sophisticated it is in its forms, and the more delicate it is. What should be at the top? Something, if not reinforcing open work, then not something that kills it. In fact a bulky mass sits on a sophisticated architecture. This is already the mistake. The figure is too wide, and too short. It should be much longer to appear normal when seen from below; the sculpture is completely unsuitable for plastic expression, bloated forms of clothing, baggy and ponderous.⁶⁶



Iofan put a circular great hall at the centre of his plan, under a dome clearly inspired by the Pantheon in Rome. The approach – up giant flights of steps, across terraces and through a vast vestibule on the scale of a railway terminus – was meant to impress.



A final series of redesigns for the palace was carried out after 1946, with the tower gradually reducing in height each time, before the project was finally abandoned by Nikita Khrushchev after Stalin's death.

Most damning of all, one speaker calculated that if all the sculpture included in the palace designs were to be completed within the two years specified by the most recent five-year plan, 700 man-years would be required to achieve it. This requirement equated to 400 skilled sculptors, 600 assistants and 500 technicians – but the total number of sculptors in the USSR at the time was just 650. Speaker after speaker suggested a lack of organic connection between the giant figure of Lenin and the building. The figure itself, with its baggy trousers and its hand gesture, were condemned as a heavy weight pressing down on a building that was attempting to soar upward. Lenin's outstretched hand would make it impossible to see his face from many angles. By this time, Iofan had already worked with the sculptor Vera Mukhina on the Paris pavilion to integrate sculpture and architecture; but here in Moscow, Iofan and Merkurov seemed to be working against each other. It was partly as a result of this onslaught that Lenin was eventually reworked, portrayed in a full-length coat rather than the baggy suit that had attracted so much criticism.

Iofan, however, was treated to admiring coverage in the pages of *Architecture of the USSR*, an English-language magazine that mixed cover portraits of Stalin and Molotov with news of recent projects. The May 1940 issue devoted twelve pages to him, printing his picture next to the latest images of the Palace of the Soviets project. There were also pages reproduced from his sketchbook showing watercolours of the Pantheon – a crucial source for the interior of the main auditorium – and the Roman amphitheatre at Syracuse. Iofan was described as a master of Soviet architecture and the piece documented the transformation of the palace from its original 1932 design to its most recent incarnation.

Almost every subsequent issue of the magazine is haunted by the shadowy presence of the Palace of the Soviets. It is there in the background of the artist's impression of every new scheme designed for central Moscow: a huge rocket blocking out the light, all-seeing and inescapable. Elsewhere, the image of the palace was reproduced at every scale, from the covers of magazines to shop windows, postage stamps and billboards. A framed original of one version used to hang on the wall of Stalin's private office. Giant-sized plaster models of it attracted huge crowds in New York and Paris. Over the course of twenty years the tower was drawn and redrawn, usually against cloudless blue skies criss-crossed by squadrons of aircraft flying in close formation. It was shown rising from a relentless open space populated by marching armies of athletic men and women waving red banners. To emphasize the

significance of the project, the moment of the presentation of the scheme to the Politburo at the Pushkin Museum is celebrated in a monumental painting from 1940 showing its members depicted in academic style, clustered around Stalin, gazing transfixed in awe at a huge model.

Even if the design as modified by Stalin wasn't exactly what Iofan had wanted, there was a certain amount of professional and personal satisfaction to be had from having his name as an architect attached to a building of such extreme scale and historical significance. It was continually compared with the achievements of Bernini and Michelangelo at the Vatican, Gustave Eiffel in Paris, even the builders of the pyramids. There was an intellectual challenge, too: Iofan was being asked to devise a new architectural language to reflect the Stalin era. As a long-standing communist, this was a task that would have appealed to him. In his words: 'The collective working on the Palace strove to take a path towards finding a new Soviet architecture, one based on a synthesis of arts, on socialist realism – i.e. on a representation in the architecture of the Palace of the Soviets of our great Stalinist era, when like a huge canvas sailcloth, architecture and sculpture clearly express the idea of a monument to the founder of the October socialist revolution, V. I. Lenin.'⁶⁷

Just at the point in 1941 when the palace project seemed to have acquired the momentum to become a physical reality – with its foundations completed and the structure made from special-grade Palace of the Soviets steel reaching up as far as the tenth floor – Germany invaded the Soviet Union. In the four months that it took the Nazis to advance to within artillery range of Moscow, much of the palace's steel was repurposed to make tank traps. Most of its workforce was equipped with rifles and dispatched to their deaths in newly dug trenches at the western approaches to the city, in an unequal battle with the approaching enemy troops.

Despite continuing to work on the project throughout the war and attempting to restart construction after the Soviet victory, Iofan was never able to reignite it. Over the years it slipped away from him as he worked through six ever more dispiriting new versions, each one smaller and less ambitious than its predecessor. The final act came in 1957, when the Palace of the Soviets metro station that had opened in May 1935 was renamed Kropotkinskaya by Khrushchev – an acknowledgment that the project would never be completed. Soon after that, the circular foundation pit was turned into a huge open-air swimming pool. The last trace of Iofan's dream had disappeared.



Khrushchev formally abandoned the Palace of the Soviets project in 1957. From the windows of his apartment across the river, Iofan would have had a view of the circular foundation pit, which was subsequently transformed into an open-air swimming pool.

And in a strange, almost supernatural reversal, twenty years after his death, the shimmering golden domes and dazzling white marble of the cathedral that had originally been destroyed to make way for the palace reappeared. It was as if the cathedral had somehow been too strong for Iofan and Stalin's demolition teams, and had spontaneously reasserted the will to exist. By that time, the site had been in turmoil for sixty-five years.

Although Iofan continued working almost until the moment of his death, his career never fully recovered from the cancellation of the Palace of the Soviets. He had done a great deal to soften the impact of Stalin's instructions to go for height; he had outlived the collaborators who were forced on him, resisting their damaging attempts to take control of the project. But he had not, in the end, been able to build the palace that would have been his most remarkable achievement.

Paris and New York

Almost a year before the opening of the 1937 Paris Exposition, Boris Iofan won the competition to design a Soviet pavilion for the event. He put forward a simple but powerful idea that combined architecture with sculpture, creating a single unforgettable image.



Iofan's Soviet pavilion at the Paris Exposition of 1937, with Vera Mukhina's huge sculpture as its highpoint, brought both artist and architect to international prominence.

The proposal was a rectangular block, some 50 feet wide and 200 feet long, with a slim tower roughly 160 feet high at one end. It would be faced with a combination of marble from Samarkand and

volcanic Black Sea porphyry. The tower would be crowned by two outsize human figures, 80 feet high, symbolizing the Soviet people. This idea had emerged from a stream of tiny but evocative charcoal sketches on which Iofan worked at the beginning of 1936, exploring the massing of volumes and the position of the sculpture. He planned the pavilion as an exhibition hall, with an imposing entrance as the prelude to a series of galleries lit by daylight – but the entire structure would also serve as the plinth for a gigantic piece of sculptural propaganda, a symbol of the Soviet Union's triumphant claim to have created an egalitarian society in the twenty years since the Bolsheviks took power.

'In designing the Paris pavilion, I had in mind Joseph Stalin's definition of our socialist labour as a deed of honour, valour and heroism. That is why I designed the Paris pavilion as a powerful, forward-moving ship, complemented with a young man and a young woman, the worker and the *kolkhoznitsa* [girl from the collective farm], holding aloft a hammer and a sickle, the tools of a peaceful life,' Iofan wrote in his spiral wire-bound notebook in preparation for a presentation.¹

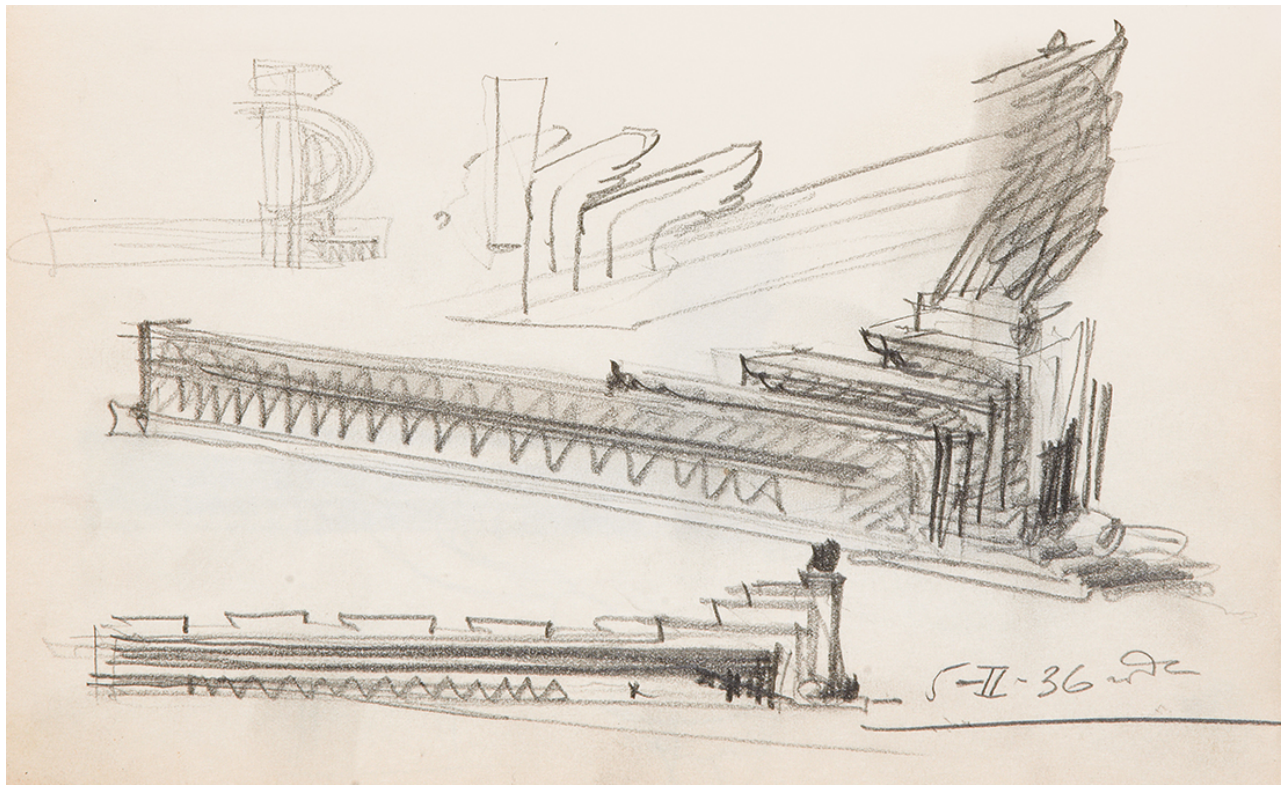
He continued: 'I remembered the speech of Comrade Stalin at the Eighth Congress of Soviets, at which I heard in his own words that socialism in the USSR had already been attained and won. This gave me the idea for showing in our Paris pavilion how our country, led for twenty years by the party of Lenin and Stalin, had succeeded in building socialism, and how our present is the future of capitalist countries.'²

For Iofan, the pavilion was an exploration, a way to test the impact of all he had been forced to accept on the design for the Palace of the Soviets two years earlier. He had fought as hard as he dared to stop the palace turning into a plinth for the gigantic sculptural representation of Lenin. Having lost that battle, he about-faced, taking as his starting point the concept of a pavilion serving as a plinth. It was as if he was trying to persuade himself that he still had a chance to make a convincing project from the material that was forced on him.

Work started on site in Paris at the end of December 1936. A few months later, on 25 May 1937, the Soviet pavilion was one of only a few international displays to be ready in time for the 101-gun salute that signalled the Exposition's official opening, presided over by French president Albert Lebrun and prime minister Léon Blum in their silk top hats. Along the way, the construction process presented few technical challenges for the 700-strong French workforce, with the exception of the pair of 80-foot-high figures crowning the tower.



Iofan and Olga around the time that Iofan was designing the Paris and New York pavilions. The American Buick convertible in the background was shipped home after Iofan visited New York in 1934.



For Stalin, the Paris Exposition was a chance to celebrate twenty years of the Soviet Union. Iofan won the competition commission for the Soviet pavilion with a simple, bold gesture: a stone base for a huge monumental sculpture. He had the concept worked out in this sketch from early 1936.

Building the fairly conventional main structure in Paris was straightforward enough; Iofan's only major change to his original design was that, in the interests of economy, the pavilion's less conspicuous elevations were finished with a pebbledash render. But creating the sculpture – a complex work of art as big as a six-storey building – in Moscow, then dismantling it and transporting the pieces 1,800 miles to Paris in order to reassemble them again, was significantly more challenging. The fact that all of this work had to be completed in the space of twenty-four weeks only increased the pressure.

Iofan based his drawings for the sculpture and its relationship with the pavilion on an ancient Greek monument to Harmodius and Aristogeiton, two individuals who are believed to have triggered Athenian democracy in 514 BC after their unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hippias, the last Greek tyrant (they did kill his brother, Hipparchus). Tyrant-slayers were still very much in favour in the Moscow of 1937, provided that their targets were not members currently in good standing with the Politburo. The message Iofan wanted his pavilion to send was twofold: first, that the revolution had ended imperial tyranny in Russia and the new state of the Soviet Union was the natural successor to Athenian democracy; and second, that the emancipated Soviet proletariat was the rightful inheritor of the classical tradition. Modernized neoclassicism, so long as it was air-conditioned and suitably lit by indirect electric light, was the natural style for the most important buildings of the workers' state. Iofan's pavilion played back to Stalin and Kaganovich exactly what they wanted to hear.

The original sculpture had disappeared from the Agora in Athens many centuries earlier, but Iofan recalled seeing a surviving Roman copy in the archaeological museum in Naples. He transformed the image of two Athenian men, whose love for each other 2,500 years ago had provoked their crime of tyrannicide, into the personification of ideal Soviet citizens in 1937. In the form that the statue finally took, a factory worker and a *kolkhoznitsa* were equipped with the appropriate symbols of their calling. The figures were actually modelled on a dancer and an employee of Moscow's metro. The worker grasps a hammer with his left hand, arm outstretched, and extends his right arm behind him for balance; the farm girl is slightly shorter than her partner, but her every muscle and sinew is fighting gravity. She

has a sickle in her right hand that pierces the air above her comrade's hammer. The two appear to vibrate with barely contained energy: industry and agriculture, united as one and marching towards a brilliant future. They would spend almost six months suspended in a mid-air confrontation with Albert Speer's German pavilion, situated directly opposite Iofan's on the site in Paris. The Soviet sickle looked ready at any moment to decapitate the Nazi eagle clutching a swastika in its claws, looking down from its perch on top of a massive Bavarian granite pylon.

Parallels between the architecture of the Nazis and that of Stalinism are familiar. Both regimes were fond of their native stone, and both looked to ancient Greece and Rome as models for their own buildings. But Stalin and Iofan, in their own ways, were both fascinated by America. The version of classicism that Iofan adapted for the pavilion owed more to what he had seen at Rockefeller Center in 1934 than to any specific Roman or Greek precedent. The Soviet pavilion's tapering profile shows that it was clearly inspired by Raymond Hood's design for the RCA Building, which Iofan had admired at first hand and sketched more than once during his New York visit. The complex in which it stood was, Iofan said, one of the few examples of a coherent city plan that he had seen anywhere in America. 'One feels an attempt has been made to create an ensemble,' he wrote on his return to Russia.³

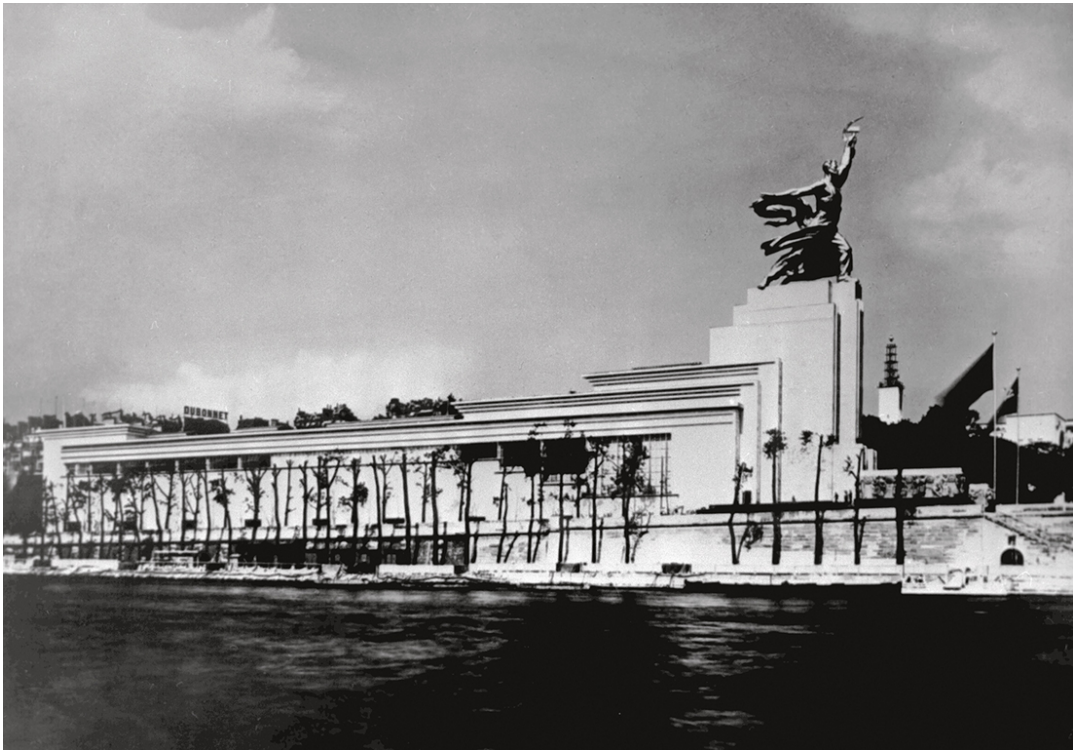
'The skyscraper', Iofan believed, 'represents a completely new type of multi-purpose building, like a city in miniature. Often it unites diverse elements, apartments and concert halls, cinemas, libraries, restaurants, stores, roof gardens and even a church.'⁴ This mixture was much like his own projects – notably the House on the Embankment, but also the Moscow development for Prince Shcherbatov that he had worked on in 1912 as Aleksandr Tamanyan's assistant.

The RCA Building seems to step down towards the bronze statue of Atlas carrying the globe that dominates the plaza at its foot. Iofan had sketched Atlas when he was in New York, looking from behind the figure, showing one foot slipping off his plinth with Fifth Avenue in the background. In sharp contrast, Iofan's pavilion pushed inexorably upwards, projecting the two figures standing on top of it forward, imbued with a dynamism that Speer aimed to beat back with the sheer mass of his German pavilion. Later, Iofan, as a dutiful communist, spelled out the symbolism of the Soviet pavilion: 'I imagined it as a building with dynamic forms and ascending ledges which calls nations to freedom, to unity and leads them to victory.'⁵

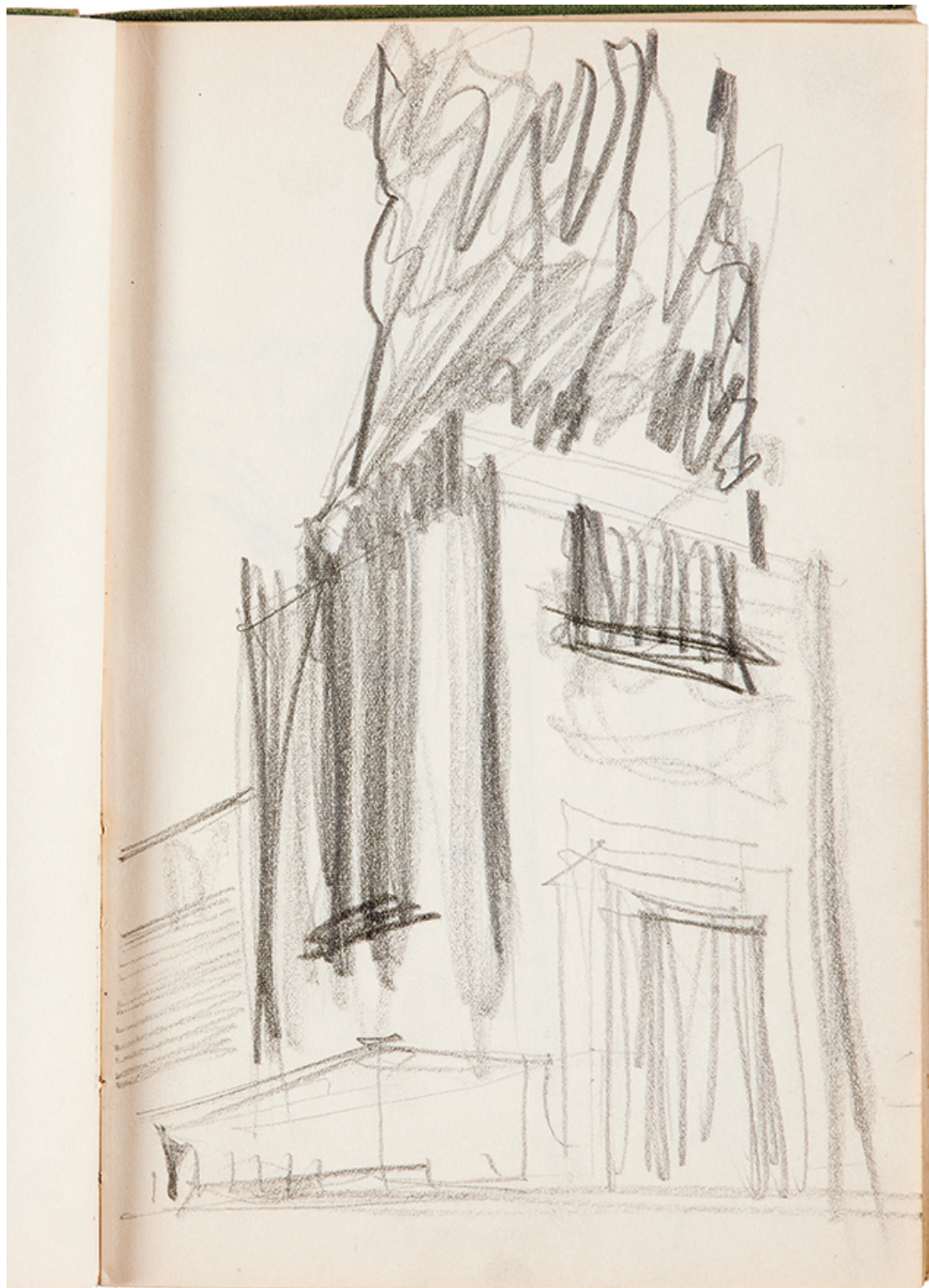
The idea of unifying sculpture with architecture to make an instantly recognizable landmark made sense in the context of the architectural zoo that is every world exposition. At the same time, Iofan had another objective. He was using both the Paris and New York pavilions as working technical prototypes for the Palace of the Soviets, on which construction was about to start in Moscow. Even though the figure of Lenin with a cantilevered arm jutting unsupported into the air was going to be four times larger than the worker and the farm girl – and dauntingly difficult to realize – the pavilions allowed him to explore both the technical and the aesthetic issues that would be involved. They would still give him the chance to see how the human figure, elevated to huge scale, would look as part of a larger architectural composition. Iofan's two pavilions allowed him to realize, at least in miniature form, the American-style skyscrapers that he admired for the first and only time in his career.



Iofan's pavilion at the Paris Exposition in 1937, photographed from the entrance to Albert Speer's German pavilion.



The Soviet building was aligned parallel to the Seine; Iofan likened his design to a ship.



When Iofan designed a building that included large-scale figural sculpture, he included detailed guidelines for the sculptor to follow, as here for the Paris pavilion.



Using a series of models, Iofan and Vera Mukhina worked on getting the correct balance between architecture and sculpture. They agreed on a 1:2 ratio for the figures relative to the pavilion.

Iofan wrote in *Arkhitektura SSSR* that ‘Radio City, or Rockefeller Center, is a group of buildings designed by a family of architects (Reinhard, Hofmeister, Hood, Fouilhoux, Corbett, Harrison and MacMurray). This group of buildings, unlike any other, is realized as a single architectural complex through the use of a tried and true device of classical architecture: two flanking six-storey structures (the British Empire Building and La Maison Française) act as *propylaea*. They organize the approach to the central building, the seventy-two-storey skyscraper, calling attention to the monumental size of this structure.’⁶ It was precisely this combination of classical formality with simplified geometry and monumental sculpture that he used in Paris, and again at the New York World’s Fair two years later.

Vera Mukhina won the commission to create the figures for the Paris pavilion through competition with three other artists. In the late autumn of 1936, she made a maquette small enough to stand on Stalin’s desk. It was the starting point for an artwork like no other, one that would need to be scaled up in successive stages to be realized at full size. Over the next few weeks, she and Iofan made a series of 1:125 scale models to test the relationship of the sculpture with the pavilion. Iofan envisaged the relationship between the dimensions of the statue and those of the building as being 1:2. ‘The problem was to find the ideal point of balance and coordination whereby the sculpture and the building would

each become an integral part of the other, the sculpture being a vital part of its base,' Mukhina wrote in her memoirs. 'The great height of the pedestal meant that the figures would be silhouetted against the sky and therefore a heavy unbroken mass was entirely out of the question. What was needed was a balanced combination of space and mass.'⁷

If there had been time, making a 1:5 scale model in clay should have been the next step. But for something as large as the two figures, this would have involved making a sculpture 15 feet high that would represent several months' intensive work for Mukhina and her assistants. Carving the work on site from stone or casting it in bronze in France, techniques with which Mukhina was familiar, would take too long and result in an object that would be far too heavy. If for no other reason than national pride, the sculpture would have to be made in the Soviet Union. Iofan speculated that it might be done with Duralumin, a relatively new aluminium alloy that Andrei Tupolev had been using to manufacture Soviet aircraft. The word – actually a German trade name for an aluminium and copper mix – and its association with aviation gave the project a modern ring, one that aligned with Stalin's taste for advanced technologies.



Albert Speer's German pavilion and Iofan's Soviet one facing off at the 1937 Paris Exposition under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, in one of the most famous architectural confrontations of the 20th century.

The pavilion was understood as the focus for a national effort. A newsreel film was made about it before the opening: Iofan and his assistants were shown supposedly at work on refining the design in his studio, one wall of which was entirely filled with an enormous perspective drawing of the pavilion. Every aspect of the state's armoury of resources was made available to make a success of the pavilion, from the archives of the national mint to the collection of the Hermitage museum. Even the Moscow Planetarium became involved, modelling the night sky over Paris for the months from May to October in order to give Iofan and Mukhina an insight into how the pavilion would look after dark.

The recently established Institute for Mechanical Engineering and Metallurgy in Moscow, which would soon be concentrating on the Soviet weapons programme, was tasked with fabricating the sculpture. Professor Pyotr Lvov, a specialist metallurgist at the Institute, rejected Duralumin. Instead he insisted on an alloy of chrome, nickel and steel, believing that this would have the necessary elastic properties to achieve the detailed treatment Mukhina wanted for the surface of the sculpture – a skin pressed as thinly as the engineers believed would be safe. New York's Chrysler Building, which had used a stainless steel alloy to form its art deco spire in 1932, provided a model for how the metal finish

would look against the sky, though Iofan had not much cared for the rest of the building when he had been in New York in 1934. Inside Mukhina's sculpture was a carefully calculated steel structure, providing the strength and rigidity it would need to resist wind and weather. Gustave Eiffel had devised something similar for the Statue of Liberty in the 1870s, although he had used a cast-iron support structure inside a heavy copper shell.

Mukhina was a formidable woman, determined enough to have overcome a traumatic childhood sledging accident that had put her in hospital for almost a year and left her face scarred for life. She had trained in the Moscow studio of the painter Konstantin Yuon, then spent eighteen months in Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière taking sculpture courses with Auguste Rodin's former disciple, Antoine Bourdelle. Afterwards, she had left Paris for a tour of Italy with her friend, the constructivist artist Lyubov Popova. They reached the Greek ruins of Paestum just before the outbreak of the First World War. Mukhina went home and spent three years as a volunteer nurse in military hospitals, surviving a typhus outbreak, before resuming her career as an artist. During the war she met Aleksei Zamkov, a doctor, and they married in 1918.

Despite coming from a wealthy family, Mukhina moved towards socialist realism, embracing Lenin's call for artists to create 'monumental propaganda' and abandoning what she had learned from the proponents of cubism in Paris. She was following an ideological trajectory much like the one taken by Iofan, as he moved from the modernism of the Barvikha sanatorium to the monumentality of the Palace of the Soviets.

Mukhina's readiness to shift her views about the nature of art did not diminish her fierce commitment to getting her own way for the pavilion's sculpture. This stubbornness demanded courage, given the horrifying extent of the purges that put artists at as much risk as class enemies, politically suspect generals and Old Bolshevik rivals of Stalin. Even as famous a figure as Kazimir Malevich was accused of political unreliability and imprisoned for several months.

Mukhina had personal experience of the Soviet criminal system. In 1930, the same year that Malevich went to jail, her husband was expelled from the medical research institute where he had been working on developing a hormone therapy for his patients. Some of his colleagues objected to his parallel work for a fashionable private practice catering to the Soviet elite. They accused Zamkov of being the medical version of an exploitative peasant farmer, a *kulak*. Using forged passports, he and Mukhina tried to escape to France. They attempted a circuitous route heading south-east but were caught before they reached the Persian frontier, taken off the train, tried and sentenced to three years of internal exile. It was only in 1932 after a personal appeal to Stalin by Maksim Gorky, a former private patient of Zamkov's, that they were able to return to Moscow.

The first of the show trials ended in August 1936 with death sentences for Kamenev and Zinoviev, who had shared power with Stalin in the triumvirate they formed to succeed Lenin and until recently had remained members of the Politburo. Nathan Lurye, one of the defendants condemned in this trial for taking part in a fantastical Trotskyist–Zinovievist–Nazi plot to assassinate the Soviet leadership, named two architects as co-conspirators. He claimed that Franz Weitz, a German citizen living in Moscow and supposedly a member of the Nazi party who had been dispatched to Moscow by Himmler, was his handler, relaying orders from Berlin and providing weapons for an assassination plot targeting Stalin. Lurye also alleged that Weitz had recruited Erikh Konstant, born in Germany but a Soviet citizen since 1927 and a graduate of the Architectural Institute in Moscow. These events gave Iofan good reason to worry about his own safety, as it transpired that both Weitz and Konstant had worked for him during the building of the House on the Embankment.

The court claimed that Weitz had returned to Germany in the autumn of 1932. Konstant was arrested and expelled from the Communist Party for Trotskyism at the end of 1935 and executed in August the following year. In the record of his interrogation by three officers of the NKVD, Konstant begins by denying all charges – but he then implausibly confesses to accepting a revolver from Weitz and setting out to assassinate Stalin, with a plan to take a shot at him from among the crowds in Red Square on May Day 1932. Even more implausibly, Konstant suggests that Stalin only survived because, when joining the architects' contingent of the Government House design team, 'quite unexpectedly at the last moment

of the formation of the column, I was appointed its leader, and walked all the time in front, and at some distance from the column'. He explains that he had a loaded revolver under his coat while passing through Red Square, but 'since I was walking in front of the column in full view of its first rows, and also because I hesitated at the moment, I could not fire a shot at Stalin'.⁸

The party group of the Union of Soviet Architects held two meetings in August and September to discuss the trial, at which Iofan was accused by Karo Alabyan of 'consorting with counter-revolutionaries'.⁹ Iofan conceded that he should have disclosed his connection with Weitz and Konstant but argued in his defence that he had only made the same mistake as many party members who simply did not devote enough energy to studying their colleagues – and it was this lack of vigilance that led to political disasters.

The session turned into a series of increasingly wild accusations against foreign architects working in the Soviet Union. Hannes Meyer, the Communist Party member and ex-Bauhaus director, was accused of being Weitz's closest friend and therefore a suspect; Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, an Austrian architect known for designing the groundbreaking 'Frankfurt kitchen', had her loyalty questioned. Both avoided arrest but both left the Soviet Union soon after.

The meeting heard that 'numerous architects working in planning organizations had been in close business and personal relations with unmasked and arrested counter-revolutionaries and failed to discover these enemies in proper time'.¹⁰ Iofan was named among them, as was Solomon Lisagor, a former assistant of Moisei Ginzburg. Lisagor was arrested in February 1936 and shot the following year; Iofan was found guilty only of the lesser charge of losing party vigilance. He admitted his errors, apologized and went back to work. But even as his studio grew busier than ever, he could not feel secure. His enemies in the architects' party group continued to work for his destruction, labelling him as the architect most responsible for allowing Gestapo agents and known terrorists to disrupt work in Moscow. It's a familiar strategy: those at risk try to save themselves by denouncing others. Iofan himself, however, was never accused of such a thing.

Stalin's campaign of terror seemed to be inescapable. Its early victims included two close friends of Iofan's from Italy: Aron Vizner was shot in 1937, most likely as a warning to his boss, Vyacheslav Molotov, about becoming too complacent about his own close relationship with Stalin. Vizner's Polish background would have counted against him, too. Aleksei Rykov, who had given Iofan the opportunity to build the House on the Embankment a decade earlier, was subjected to Stalin's full repertoire of intimidation: it began with symbolic gestures, and then escalated. Humiliation was typically the first signal of the dictator's displeasure. In 1929 Rykov lost one of his three main positions, that of president of the Russian Federal Republic; late in the following year, Molotov replaced him as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. He was first demoted to the position of commissar of post and telephones and then, in 1931, expelled from the Politburo. Stalin had weakened his rivals, but was not yet ready to liquidate them. Eventually, in October 1936, Rykov was relocated with his family from their magnificent seven-room apartment in the Kremlin to a still impressive but clearly inferior flat in the House on the Embankment.

Iofan helped Rykov move his papers to his new home. For months, a stack of boxes containing the early records of the Council of Supreme Soviets remained sitting in a corridor outside his new apartment. Even as he moved house Rykov understood what was coming. He warned Iofan, who was in the process of building a dacha for the Rykovs in Valuyevo, not to contact him for fear of being judged guilty by association. His wife, Nina, confided to Olga Iofan that her husband had talked to her about a suicide pact.

One morning in February 1937 Rykov emerged from the House on the Embankment, carefully dressed in a pressed suit and a broadly knotted tie. He said goodbye to his daughter and climbed calmly into a waiting GAZ limousine. He was driven to a Politburo meeting at which he was arrested, as he had known he would be.

In the evening the Iofans witnessed the secret police arriving to search the Rykovs' apartment, closing off his study with official wax seals. Rykov was subjected to the months-long interrogation that

the Soviets called ‘special measures’. He had previously asserted his innocence, telling friends that he would never plead guilty to a crime he had not committed. The mental and physical torture, however, had its intended effect, and Rykov’s mind was changed. He pleaded guilty at his trial. A copy of his appeal for clemency is in the Library of Congress in Washington.

To the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

On March 13 [of this year] the Military Tribunal of the Supreme Court condemned me to death by shooting. I ask for clemency.

My guilt before the party and the country is great, but I have a passionate desire and, I think, enough strength to expiate it.

I ask you to believe that I am not a completely corrupt person. In my life there were many years of noble, honest work for the revolution. I can still prove that even after having committed so many crimes, it is possible to become an honest person and to die with honour.

I ask that you spare my life.

March 13, 1938

[signed] A. I. Rykov ¹¹

The appeal was unsuccessful and he faced a firing squad three days later. After his execution, Nina and their daughter Natalia were arrested. Nina was also shot, while Natalia, then a young woman, spent the next eighteen years in the gulag; she later suggested that Iofan did what he could to help her at this time. During the war, Olga Iofan’s son Boris, an air force technician, was in Siberia and attempted to find Natalia in the sprawling cluster of camps around Vorkuta, a mining town inside the Arctic Circle, but to no avail. When she was finally freed, Khrushchev found her a job as a schoolteacher.

Of all the countless deaths during the terror of the purges, those of Aleksei and Nina Rykov were the two that touched the Iofans most closely. The two families had been friends for more than a decade, visiting each other’s homes, holidaying together and becoming neighbours.

For much of this period, while Iofan travelled to Rome, Paris and New York to attend conferences and supervise work on the two Soviet pavilions, Olga was left on her own in Moscow with her children and her young grandson. She was acutely aware of how vulnerable her aristocratic connections made them and did her best to conceal her background. The generous fees that Iofan earned through his work on the Palace of the Soviets allowed the family to live well, employing a housekeeper and maintaining the Buick that he had shipped back from America in 1934. But Olga dressed modestly and was always careful never to speak Italian to the children in public.

Much to her concern, a dressmaker who had once worked for the imperial family and who now lived in the House on the Embankment repeatedly tried to persuade her to commission new outfits for the official functions the Iofans were regularly invited to attend. In the gossip-filled world of Moscow during the purges, it is inconceivable that there were not some people who knew Olga’s story. The family’s survival would have depended on the strength of Iofan’s ongoing connections with the highest levels of the secret police.

Even with his humbler background, Iofan had more than enough cause to worry after the charge of consorting with Trotskyites. His membership of the Communist Party set him apart from most of Moscow’s prominent architects, who never joined it. But although this brought him closer to the centre of power in the Kremlin, it was also true that party members were more likely to be victims of denunciation than the politically inactive. Iofan could look out from his apartment in the building that he had designed himself, over the Moskva River, and see the twelve cranes rising on the site of the Palace of the Soviets – the most important piece of architectural propaganda in the entire country, of which he was in charge. Yet despite all of that, he was clearly a candidate for arrest.

The fact that he came from a Jewish family was, in itself, enough to cause suspicion during Stalin’s increasingly deranged anti-Semitic last years. Iofan had spent ten years in Italy and, after his return to Russia, had continued to travel abroad extensively. These were dangerous privileges. Even after the war with Germany ended, such a record provided ammunition for a campaign against him in *Pravda*. In

1949 he was denounced for his decadent bourgeois values. Iofan and five others were targeted in an attack on the Academy of Architects and its scientific committee, which was charged with ‘hampering the development of the architectural sciences by having continued to grovel before the bourgeois models not only of the USA but of Paris and Rome’ and ‘slavishly grovelling to the American building system at a time when President Truman himself was forced to admit that millions of US citizens have to live in big city slums and peasant hovels’.¹² Thanks to a combination of carefully cultivated friendships and random good fortune, Iofan survived all these dangers – although there is some speculation that he also had the protection of Stalin himself, at least for a time. Iofan’s family believe that Stalin had Iofan’s name removed from one of Lavrenty Beria’s notorious death lists, scratching it out and noting: ‘This one will still be useful to us.’

Gustav Klutsis, an artist and former pupil of Kazimir Malevich who was responsible for a series of striking photographic collages used in the 1937 Paris pavilion, had no such protection. He had been a Latvian Rifleman in the Red Army and participated in the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917; he had been one of Lenin’s bodyguards and taken part in the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising in 1921. But despite all of this he was arrested on 17 January 1938, not long after returning from Paris. The bureaucratic nature of the official Soviet mass murder machine has ensured that there are photographs of him, both in profile and full face, taken immediately before he was shot in Moscow at the Butovo firing range. A total of 20,761 people were executed there in the space of fourteen months, and Klutsis died during one of its busiest periods: on 28 February 1938, 562 people were killed.

Ivan Mezhlauk, commissioner for the Paris pavilion, met a similar fate. Mezhlauk and Klutsis were both working with Iofan on plans for the Soviet pavilion at the New York World’s Fair in 1939 at the time of their disappearance, which led to a delay in the preparations. Mezhlauk, who had been a senior figure at the Ministry of Heavy Industry, was replaced by Vasily Burgman, a member of Stalin’s entourage, as the commissioner for the pavilion; but Klutsis’s death went unacknowledged for half a century.

In her diary entry for 16 January 1939, Klutsis’s wife, the artist Valentina Kulagina, wrote:

Today is the first anniversary of the last day Gustav was at home. Tomorrow, they’re coming from the census bureau. What am I supposed to say – ‘married’? Where’s my husband? Oh, if I only knew what the charges are against him! They told me that there was no point in trying to obtain permission for correspondence, or to find out where he was, they were not going to tell me. When I blurted out ‘Why?’ I was told in a chilly tone, ‘When we send someone to an isolation camp, it must be for a reason.’

Well, he’s right of course, but that doesn’t make it any easier for me. A year ago today...we sat and talked until about one a.m. Everything was fine. We went to bed, fell asleep. At four in the morning I heard a loud sharp knocking. I waited. After they knocked a second time, I got up, threw on a robe. And went to open it. There were two military men and they asked, does Klutsis live here? I knew right away what it was about, and I was surprisingly calm. And, in fact, I remained calm the whole time. Only when they took him away, while I stood at the window, I felt like running downstairs again, and saying goodbye one more time. By then it was already morning.¹³

It was not until 1989 – two years after Valentina’s death – that their son, Edvard Kulagin, finally received official confirmation that his father had been executed. It was explained to him that Klutsis’s membership of a Latvian cultural organization had made him an enemy of the people. He had been shot just twenty-six days after he was taken away in the night.

Vyacheslav Oltarzhevsky, who had guided Iofan on his visit to Rockefeller Center, was arrested in 1937, three years after he returned – at Iofan’s urging – from a decade spent living in New York. His almost complete pavilion for the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow was demolished on the grounds that it was insufficiently Soviet, and he spent the next six years in a prison camp. After his

release he designed the Soviet Foreign Ministry, one of Stalin's post-war high-rises. Even Miron Merzhanov, the designer of Stalin's villa in Sochi and perhaps the architect who spent more time with the dictator than any other, did not escape a sentence in the prison camps with hard labour.

Nikolai Suetin, who led the team working on the pavilion's interior, and his deputy, Konstantin Rozhdestvensky, were ordered home from Paris in a telegram at the end of July 1937. They were anxious enough about the ominous significance of such a summons to swap coats when they booked in at their hotel in Moscow. In the event that one of them was arrested in the night, he would at least be able to let the other know of his fate by asking to retrieve his coat before being marched away. As it turned out, Suetin remained free and later did his best to steer work to Valentina Kulagina, Klutsis's widow, to help her survive.

Mikhail Kryukov, dean of the Architecture Academy, former Moscow city architect and, for a time, in charge of the construction of the Palace of the Soviets (when he fell out with Iofan) was arrested in 1938. Under torture he was forced to confess to having been a saboteur since the 1920s. He was sent to a labour camp, where he subsequently died. By that time, his successor as head of construction on the palace had also been executed; and Vladimir Degot, the Comintern agent in Italy whom Iofan had invited to Narni and worked with on the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, also died in a labour camp around this time.

Even though she understood the brutality of Soviet cultural politics very well, the forty-five-year-old Vera Mukhina remained undaunted. She understood that the sculpture commission for the pavilion in Paris would make her an internationally recognized figure provided that she maintained creative control, and she was determined to do so. Some years later, Isaak Eigel, after meeting her for the first time, described her as 'a middle-aged, plump, modestly dressed woman with a firm and imperious face. She could be mistaken for a school director or for the type of woman emerging in the late thirties – the leader of a large factory collective.'¹⁴ Every step in the transition from competition-winning maquette to completed full-size work involved a new battle, most of which Mukhina won.

At first, she was vehemently opposed to the idea of using stainless steel. 'Could steel be readily shaped into a sphere, or was such a surface only to be achieved by joining a mosaic of tiny steel fragments together? If this were the case, the plastic qualities of steel would be nil,' she told Iofan.¹⁵ The metallurgist Pyotr Lvov changed her mind by having the Institute for Mechanical Engineering and Metallurgy make a full-size slice of Michelangelo's *David* out of steel, using a plaster cast of the original, as a sample of what was possible. 'It proved to be a wonderfully malleable material,' Mukhina conceded. 'However, there remained many doubts, the most serious of which was whether the sculpture would appear "tinny" once it had been deprived of its greatest asset, a physical sensation of mass.'¹⁶

Initially she had envisaged presenting both figures in as naked a state as their classical antecedents. She added a swirling stole to connect them, evoking the Louvre's *Winged Victory* – not so as to appease the prudish, but for the sake of the composition. She and Iofan were overruled on the idea of classical nudity by the panel overseeing the project; Molotov, its chairman, insisted that the figures should be clothed. Mukhina put the man in overalls and gave the woman a light summer dress, but she stubbornly insisted on retaining the stole despite Molotov's objections. Shrewdly, she justified her preference on ideological as well as artistic grounds: the stole, she said, was 'streaming behind the figures to symbolize the red banner that was always a living part of all our demonstrations'. The issue that most exercised her was the role that this element of the work needed to play in connecting architecture and sculpture. 'The stole was so vital that I felt that the whole composition, and the relationship between the figures and the building, would be disrupted without it.'¹⁷

Because of technical objections by the Institute, which believed that stabilizing this 5.5-tonne piece of steel would demand an impossibly complex piece of structural engineering, Mukhina had to design five different versions of the stole before it was approved. But there were also questions of interpretation to deal with. Molotov asked Mukhina why her farm girl was wearing it: 'She is not a dancer, or a skater; why does she need a scarf?' Mukhina answered that the stole was there to balance

the composition. Taking this to be a technical rather than an aesthetic justification, Molotov gave his formal approval on 11 November 1936.

Mukhina was always loyal to Iofan, even when confronted by suggestions from the jury of the Stalin Prize that without her sculpture the pavilion would be meaningless. 'The idea was Iofan's. He is the first to have combined sculpture and architecture in this way. Before Iofan no one had been bold enough to place such a gigantic figure on a building. I always took his desires into account, even though there were many changes that I made.'¹⁸

As there wasn't time to create the sculpture in its final form at a fifth of its actual size, Mukhina took the riskier approach of working on a 1:15 scale version in clay. This would inevitably make the smallest errors become major problems at full size and would increase the effort needed to correct them, but at least it would allow the factory to make a start. The model, even at this reduced scale, took Mukhina and her two assistants, working without a break, a whole month to complete. During the process she sustained herself with regular injections of her husband's hormone therapy, which was derived from the urine of pregnant women.

The clay model reached the Institute's factory in the first week of December, with just twenty weeks to go before the April deadline for delivering the completed work to Paris. A team of technicians worked on Mukhina's sketches and maquettes, scaling them up to create a set of drawings reflecting the size and form of the complete work. These would be the basis for making the moulds used to shape the malleable steel plate to form the surface of the two figures and create the armature to which the completed steel sections would be welded.

By this time the director of the Institute for Mechanical Engineering and Metallurgy, S. P. Tambovtsev, had put on record his objections to Mukhina's approach. She was, he claimed, jeopardizing the whole project with her intransigent demands for continual revisions and her many delays. He even went so far as to claim that Mukhina had smuggled a representation of Trotsky's profile into the surface of the statue. She ignored him and moved into the factory with her assistants. They worked to refine their clay models, overseeing carpenters as they made wooden moulds which would be used to form the steel components. At first Mukhina checked every chisel cut until the Institute's craftsmen, skilled in making machine castings in which aesthetic judgment played little part, fully understood what was expected of them.

As work progressed, the factory took on the appearance of a surreal landscape scattered with fragments of gigantic body parts. Mukhina remembered one particular night when a whole shift of carpenters, carrying tools on their way to work inside the female torso, paused to line up side by side to fill the gaping cross-section of an arm open at the shoulder like a cave mouth. There was a segment of a hand to one side of them, a leg to the other. Forges full of hot metal cast a lurid light on the empty moulds. Overhead, a gigantic arm swung in the air from a gantry crane and a massive head stood waiting, like a sphinx in the desert, to be taken outside. Elsewhere was an abandoned workman's boot the size of a car, the result of a failed experiment at fabricating the statue.

At first, the strategy had been to divide each mould into smaller pieces that would be easier to handle. The boot had been split in two at the ankle, but as the team tried to fit the sections together they damaged both moulds. They were replaced by a single hollowed-out mould, lined with steel and reinforced at the edges. As Mukhina recalled: 'The mould for the male pelvis, although it seemed simple enough, was actually a key section. There were five openings in it, two for the legs, two for the stole and one for the point of contact between the two figures. If the cross-section were the slightest bit off the given angle, the five parts would no longer align with the whole, making it impossible to fit them to the armature.'¹⁹

In the factory yard outside was what Mukhina called the 'iron mountain': the armature rising the full height of the complete sculpture, to which the steel skin was gradually being applied. Work progressed at a furious pace throughout the dark and icy Moscow winter in order to meet the Paris deadline. Fitters and welders lived on the site, working in shifts, gathering round the stove in the equipment hut for a few hours' sleep each night. Scaffolding supporting the iron mountain needed defrosting when the blizzards

came, while the torrent of sparks from teams of spot welders cascaded down the cliff face of this metal Mount Rushmore.

Finally, it was complete. Mukhina remembered an early spring night when Iofan appeared at her studio long after midnight to tell her that Stalin, Molotov and Mezhlauk had come to see her work for themselves. For twenty minutes the two huge metal figures were picked out by searchlights that Iofan had installed in the yard at the Institute, while Stalin smoked his pipe and waited for Molotov and the others to speak first before revealing his own view. They were impressed with Comrade Mukhina's work; it could go to Paris.

The sculpture that had been so painstakingly put together was equally carefully dismantled into fifty-five pieces, cleaned in sand and packed in crates. To avoid changing trains at the Polish frontier, the crates were loaded onto twenty-eight special flatbed railway wagons with sliding wheel sets that could be used both on Russian broad-gauge tracks and standard European gauge. The load still turned out to be too wide for the restricted clearance in Polish tunnels, so one of the engineers from Moscow travelling with the train had the crates opened and cut the contents into even smaller pieces, allowing them to navigate the remaining obstacles all the way to Paris.

The Paris Exposition of 1937 was a massive popular attraction, visited by thirty-seven million people during six months. They enjoyed eating ice-cream, drinking beer, buying souvenirs and taking a ride on the road trains that toured the site, complete with a uniformed conductor in the last carriage. They could marvel at the spectacle of a hall full of aircraft, or the French Colonial section that recreated an Arab settlement alongside Saharan tents and the Cambodian ruins of Angkor Wat. It was a dizzy mix of the spectacular and the hokey that foreshadowed Disneyland and the theme park. You could take a camel ride or risk a fixed-line parachute jump, have your palm read for two francs, sample Coca-Cola or calvados – the latter dispensed by a sales force in full Breton costume. You could see murals by Fernand Léger and Sonia Delaunay, who, like Iofan, had been born in Ukraine. There was a funfair to enjoy, formal gardens to take a stroll in, booths in which to shy coconuts. Everyone from Josephine Baker to Walter Benjamin came.

But at another level, the Exposition was deeply political. The young Italian designer Ettore Sottsass wrote in his diary about the experience of sitting in the Spanish pavilion – designed by Josep Lluís Sert, with an Alexander Calder fountain spewing liquid mercury – transfixed by Picasso's *Guernica*, which seemed to suck out all colour from the space. *Guernica* had been completed in the thirty days since German bombers had destroyed the little Basque town that was its namesake. Franco's rebel forces were celebrated elsewhere in the Exposition, in the Vatican pavilion in a painting portraying the deaths of those that the nationalists called martyrs. This was the work of Sert's cousin José María Sert, who had previously painted over Diego Rivera's Lenin fresco in New York at Nelson Rockefeller's request.

The wider political story behind the Exposition was that it had been initiated by a right-wing French government, and preparations had been well under way by the time the administration was replaced by the short-lived leftist Popular Front in 1936. Both governments, in their own ways, had been pursuing a policy of appeasing Nazi Germany. They were hoping for peace while inadequately preparing for war. Germany and the Soviet Union, who were using the Spanish civil war as a proxy fight between them, were each unsure how the other would respond to their diplomatic manoeuvres with the democracies at a time when the network of European alliances was unclear. In this context the Exposition became a kind of international stage, from which all sides were trying to address each other as well as the French public.

Both Germany and the Soviet Union wanted to present themselves as powerful without actually appearing threatening. The Exposition masterplan, in which neither had played a part, placed Germany and the Soviet Union in commanding positions on the right bank of the Seine at the entrance to the site below the Trocadero, at either side of an axis dominated by the Eiffel Tower.

Hitler had rejected the proposals for the German pavilion put forward by his officials. After the early death of Paul Troost, his most favoured architect, he had appointed Albert Speer to design it. Troost's former assistant, Woldemar Brinkmann, was given the job of designing the exhibition inside the

pavilion. Lilly Reich, Mies van der Rohe's companion, was ready to work for the Nazis in Paris, contributing to the German display in the International Pavilion.

The Soviet Union, which had been planning its pavilion since 1935, could not be so obviously dictatorial as to appoint a team to design a national project without the appearance of due process. It therefore held a series of competitions: one to appoint an architect for the pavilion, then a designer for the exhibition, and finally an artist for the sculpture. The seven participants in the architectural competition reflected the shifting balance of power in Soviet architecture and its move away from the free experimentation of the constructivists to a more monumental official style. At one end of the spectrum were Konstantin Melnikov, seeking to repeat his success at the 1925 Paris Exposition, and Moisei Ginzburg, architect of the brilliantly original Narkomfin Building. It would be their last chance to win a high-profile state commission: neither was invited to compete for the New York pavilion as the brief, issued the following year, specifically ruled out constructivism.

Vladimir Shchuko and Vladimir Gelfreikh, working with Iofan on the Palace of the Soviets, represented traditional academicism. The younger generation of competitors included Karo Alabyan, regarded by some as the embodiment of Stalinist brutality (and blamed for the recent arrest and execution of the radical urbanist Mikhail Okhitovich), and Dmitry Chechulin. Alabyan later went on to work with Iofan on the Soviet pavilion in New York at the 1939 World's Fair, despite having repeatedly denounced him to party colleagues for consorting with fascist terrorists. It was Chechulin who would turn the foundations of Iofan's Palace of the Soviets into an open-air swimming pool after Stalin's death, when Nikita Khrushchev finally scrapped the building.

In the account of architectural historian Danilo Udovicki-Selb, after making his presentation, Melnikov was apparently so convinced he had won the competition that on returning to the beehive-like house he had built himself in the Arbat quarter of Moscow, he called to his family: 'Pack the luggage, we are going to Paris.'²⁰ His son's intemperate claim years later that Iofan's victory was another example of the privileging of Jewish architects in the Soviet Union is a reflection of the pervasive and virulent nature of Soviet anti-Semitism.

The 1937 Paris competition brief asked for the architecture of the Soviet pavilion to be treated as an exhibit in itself, demonstrating the most advanced building technologies. 'It should be an expression of thriving socialist art and culture, of the skills and creativity of the masses, freed by the socialist system. The pavilion must show, through a clear and joyful architecture, the system's creativity, and its capacity to mediate an unprecedented development of mass culture, as well as of all the creative potential of man.'²¹

Nikolai Suetin, creative director of the state porcelain factory in Leningrad, won a two-stage competition for the pavilion's internal exhibition design. The first brief, in 1935, asked for a consistent and logical approach to give visitors a clear view of the exhibits. In the second round, Ivan Mezhlauk spelled out that 'The decoration should correspond to the pavilion's architectural design by Boris Michaelovich Iofan.'²² Suetin would work with Iofan again, taking on the Soviet pavilion's exhibition design for the New York World's Fair. While they never became close, their partnership did reflect the Soviet leadership's efforts to present a balance of power between the very distinct architectural cultures of Leningrad and Moscow.

Stalin knew Iofan and saw him regularly, although they never had the close personal relationship that Iofan's contemporary Albert Speer enjoyed with Hitler. Iofan remained an architect – unlike Speer, who suspended his work on rebuilding Berlin in order to take charge of the Nazi armaments industry.

Like two prizefighters, before climbing into the ring Iofan and Speer were each primed by their respective trainers on how to perform. Tactics were discussed before going to Paris. Hitler was photographed in informal style with Speer, stooped over a model of the pavilion to see how it would look from eye level. Aleksandr Bubnov monumentalized Stalin's triumphant leadership of the project in a painting from 1940 that shows him standing magisterially alone, in uniform, in front of Mukhina's maquette and a model of the Moscow–Volga Canal installations. Despite this posturing, neither of the dictators actually travelled to Paris to see their projects realized.

If the rivalry on the drawing boards of Iofan and Speer was a metaphorical conflict, once construction had actually started there was a risk of real bloodshed. By the time Mukhina arrived in Paris on 6 April 1937 with her son, Vsevolod Zamkov (the fact that he was allowed to travel abroad with her was exceptional), the main building was complete. The tower was still surrounded by scaffolding and a crane was in place to install the statue on the roof of the pavilion. Zamkov, who spoke French, spent the next few weeks working as Mezhlauk's assistant, joining the team of twenty fitters, welders and tinsmiths and four engineers led by Professor Lvov, who had travelled on the same train that was carrying the crated statue. Iofan had to vouch for Mukhina and her female assistant at the security checkpoint in the Exposition grounds, where the guards initially refused to believe two women could be working on a pavilion and tried to turn them away. When they finally got through, they found the statue's two pairs of shoes already in place.

As the pavilions neared completion, the Russians claimed that a serious attempt had been made to sabotage Mukhina's sculpture. In his diary, Zamkov recalled a Spanish official walking over from the nearby Republican pavilion to warn that he had seen something suspicious at the Russian pavilion the previous night. 'He advised us to urgently check our winches and ropes, which regulated the work of the crane. It turned out that one of the ropes had been cut. Had we started work without checking, it would certainly have led to a catastrophe, and likely to a complete destruction of the statue. The Parisian police, who were called immediately after the incident, only shook their heads and pretended that what we were telling them was not true.'²³ Thereafter, Mezhlauk positioned volunteer guards from the French Communist Party around the pavilion until the statue was safely completed. Mukhina proudly claimed that the team had finished the installation in eleven days, beating their planned schedule by forty-eight hours.

Gustav Klutssis was less sanguine about progress on the fitting out of the interior. He sent a postcard dated 22 May to his wife in Moscow just before the pavilion opened, in the midst of a frantic drive to get everything finished: 'The exhibits came two days before opening day, what happened next defies description, none of us could afford to sleep a wink, even standing up.'²⁴

Each of the five galleries in the pavilion was allocated to a particular artist or designer whose job, apart from looking after their own work, was to supervise the installation. Klutssis worked on the last room, with its bronze representation of Stalin. He wrote to his wife:

(Ivan) Buer is in charge of the first, (Vasily) Sigorsky of the second, (Aleksandr) Zamoshkin of the third, and the fourth is (Boris) Iordansky. They gave us each an assistant and an interpreter. Here the staff and all the specialists are French, except for the top management. They are good folk, but they work slowly, or maybe it just seems that way.

I have not really started working on my own direct task, as I have not yet been able to find my sketch. Yesterday, several hundred boxes of exhibits arrived over the course of the whole day.

Naturally it is impossible to get it all straightened out at once.'²⁵

Klutssis spent his first night in Paris endlessly uncrating boxes in the pavilion. Again, he wrote: 'I did not even get the chance to close my eyes for a few seconds to sleep standing up.'²⁶ He finally got to his room at the Hôtel des Ministères the following morning.

Klutssis had little time for the hangers-on and bureaucrats who had managed to arrange to travel from Moscow to take part in the opening. Some would certainly have been spies or informers. 'There are many people here whose job is unclear or who aren't doing their jobs. As has always happened, the artists have to pick up the slack, and take on a triple burden. I have had to buy materials, and make sure there was a supply of tall ladders.'²⁷

The official opening of the Soviet pavilion took place on the afternoon of 26 May. There were politicians and ambassadors, and speeches from both Soviet and French officials. *Pravda* was predictably enthusiastic about the event:

Paris, 26th of May (special correspondent of *Pravda*): Today, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the Soviet pavilion at the International Exposition opened its doors to the public. People began arriving in the morning. They waited impatiently for the minute when the doors would swing open. Next to the doors, a group of workers (stone workers judging from their attire) were arguing with a fancily dressed pair about their place in the queue.

The pavilion was only open for five hours. In that time, some 40,000 visitors passed through its doors. Parisians hailing from various classes and ranks, provincials, Breton women in velvet skirts, peasant women from Calvados, Europeans of all nationalities, blacks, Indians, Moroccans, all mixed into a colourful and noisy crowd.

The attention of the public is concentrated mainly on the map of the USSR, made from Ural gemstones. There is so much interest, that there are simply not enough staff to support the visitors. As a result, the main commissar, I. I. Mezhlauk, had to act as the guide. He was explaining the exhibits to a group of workers dressed in workwear, who probably came to see the pavilion straight from the factory.²⁸

For Iofan and the artists and designers who came with him, this time spent in Paris was a brief but dizzying moment of freedom during which they could take their place alongside their peers and be a part of the wider world, away from the constant fear of arrest and execution. This was, after all, a time when Soviet architects needed special permission to import even a single copy of an American architectural magazine; and if they succeeded, it would likely be used to demonstrate their political unreliability. Even while the 1937 Exposition was under way, Russian émigrés in Paris were being abducted by Soviet agents, smuggled back to Moscow and shot. The following year, Trotsky's son Lev Sedov was murdered by the NKVD in a Paris hospital.

Fellow travellers in other nations, such as Romain Rolland and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, tended to dismiss news of the trials. For some on the left, the Soviet Union was still a bulwark against the evil of the Nazis, Franco's nationalist rebels and Mussolini's Italy. But it was becoming glaringly apparent to those not hypnotized by the spell of the Soviet Union that something terrible was under way.

Nevertheless, for a few days in France things felt different. Iofan joined the Soviet delegation that attended a conference with France's leading artists. Klutskis wrote of drinking champagne to celebrate Soviet success and was photographed, smiling, with Iofan under Mukhina's sculpture. There was a chance for the Russians to meet Picasso in his studio – where he was coming to the end of his intensive sprint to complete *Guernica* – as well as Le Corbusier, Léger and Marc Chagall, and even to go shopping. Klutskis went home with two Parisian suits and a trilby hat.

Suetin left the fairgrounds as soon as he decently could, having seen Raoul Dufy's mural in the French pavilion. He visited exhibitions on Van Gogh and El Greco. He saw Chagall's *The Revolution*. He met Léger and Le Corbusier. He took the train to Rouen to visit the tapestry artist Jean Lurçat, who had recently exhibited his work in Moscow. Klutskis, by his own account, was less sociable. In the three weeks he spent in Paris he devoted himself to the museums and to walking the streets and admiring the banners of the Paris Commune. 'Everywhere I go alone, I go without a single person for company. You're much more mobile that way and can go exactly where you want to go. Especially as all of our "artists", after arriving in Paris, have contracted megalomania.'²⁹

In a postcard Suetin sent to his wife on the day after the opening, he was disarmingly self-critical about what he had achieved with the exhibition. He was concerned that the first gallery, celebrating the recently adopted Stalin constitution for the Soviet Union, was 'the most decorated of all, but proved overloaded'.³⁰ The second was about town planning and architecture, with displays on the plan for Moscow, models of the Moscow metro, the Red Army Theatre and Gorky Park. Gallery three was, in Suetin's view, the best of all and much more spacious than the others, but the Soviet mint and Hermitage installations were less successful. He thought that gallery four, dedicated to painting, sculpture and folk art, was 'a failure with its furs'.³¹ Sprinkled along the route through the halls were displays on Gorky and Pushkin (in his jubilee year), on cinema and radio, on education and museums,

and a 215-square-foot ceramic map of the Soviet Union inlaid with ten thousand gems. Suetin was pleased with his Leningrad painter friend Boris Ender's work on the colour scheme, treating each of the five spaces in its own way.

Technically speaking, Iofan had been faced with the challenge of working around a section of the Boulevard de Tokyo running in a tunnel beneath the site. He had concealed this potentially awkward intrusion in the cross-section of the pavilion. In effect, the rear two-thirds of the building above the road was a relatively low, single-storey volume, while the unconstrained section at the entrance beneath Mukhina's sculpture was a sequence of soaring, high-roofed spaces. The entrance vestibule was 50 feet high and lined by Klutis's dynamic photomontages. A Stalin diesel tractor – a slab of raw steel on caterpillar tracks, built for use on both collective farms and the battlefield – was an intimidating presence, incongruously positioned beneath two huge canvases painted in academic style.

The space beyond the vestibule was almost as tall and opened onto a dramatic cascade of stairs. These were emphasized by a double file of pylons derived from Suetin's work with Kazimir Malevich and his *arkhitekton* pieces, which occupied a position between sculpture and architecture. They formed the backdrop to a glossy black GAZ limousine at the base of the stairs and proud typographic boasts, designed by Klutis, that the Soviet Union was a land without unemployment. Three terraced landings swept visitors up from the entrance hall to the rear section, dominated by Sergei Merkurov's massive representation of Stalin in bronze. This juxtaposition of a cascade of stairs topped by a heroic figurative monument irresistibly suggested Francesco Boffo's framing of the Duc de Richelieu by the Odessa Steps in Iofan's birthplace.

Iofan's plaster model of the Palace of the Soviets began the climactic sequence, which moved by way of a seated Lenin towards its grand finale. Merkurov's bronze statue depicted Stalin in a greatcoat reaching to his shoes, suggestive of a toga; it was the largest and most reverent of the seventy images (by one count) of Stalin in the entire 15,000-square-foot exhibition. It occupied the centre of the space, garlanded with flowers placed all around its base, and everything else was set back at a respectful distance against the walls. Framed by benches from which visitors could pay silent tribute, the gallery was lined on three sides with gigantic canvases 20 feet tall. Behind Stalin, Aleksandr Deineka's *The Noble People of the Land of the Soviets* showed men and women dressed all in white striding toward the Palace of the Soviets – which of course, at this stage, was no more than a hole in the ground where the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour had once stood. Aleksei Pakhomov portrayed young pioneers flying model airplanes, while Aleksandr Samokhvalov depicted a sports stadium. Having taken in these images, visitors could exit by way of an external staircase at the side of the pavilion.



Nikolai Suetin's interior for the Soviet pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition reflected the philosophy of his mentor, Kazimir Malevich. The graphics were the work of Gustav Klutss, who was arrested and executed within months of his return from Paris.

The 1937 Soviet pavilion depicted a land of plenty, despite the famine that had recently killed millions in Ukraine. It showed a country of well-housed citizens, despite the fact that living space in Moscow fell from 54 to 48.5 square feet per person during the course of the decade. It portrayed a happy and contented people and respected creative artists, even in the midst of the horrifying purges that would kill 1.5 million in the course of eighteen months – including several people who had worked on the pavilion. It celebrated the democratic constitution of the Soviet Union, but in its sequence of representations of Stalin it embodied the cult of personality.

In Merkurov's view, it was the best pavilion at the Paris Exposition. As he put it: 'I've been told by people who were there that what people were expecting was a building made out of logs, and that out of it would step an enormous shaggy Bolshevik carrying a knife. But what was actually built was a wonderful building.'³² Gustav Klutsis, writing to his wife at the time, was also enthusiastic: 'Our pavilion is wonderful, from far, close-up and inside. Remarkable sculptures by Mukhina. It is full of people all the time. It looks really good in its lightness, clearness and new ideas. Unknown hands, probably French, male and female workers bring unusually bright roses and cover the bust of Illich.'³³

Of course, the 1937 Russian team went to look at the German pavilion and their comments about it were predictably dismissive. Klutsis called it a 'sarcophagus'; as for the contents: 'There are clearly a number of things that we need to get the hang of. Generally, it is all technology and technologism, with no ideas, no emotions, and no creative goal.'³⁴ Suetin conceded: 'The showcases, stands and decoration in general are good but lifeless and revoltingly modernist. The Paris shops are much better.'³⁵

Like its Soviet counterpart, the German pavilion made extensive use of sculpture inside and out. Josef Thorak's massive group of muscular, naked Teutons depicting Nazi comradeship, which flanked the entrance, mirrored Iosif Chaikov's allegorical figures celebrating the triumph of socialism around the Soviet pavilion's *propylaea*. Thorak's figures emphasized solidity, mass and intransigence, while the figures in Mukhina's sculpture were full of energy and movement.

Albert Speer's account of the project (unreliable as ever) claims that he stumbled across Iofan's scheme accidentally on a site visit to Paris and adjusted his design accordingly in an attempt to express greater strength and power. As he told it many years later:

The Soviet Russian and German pavilions were to be placed directly opposite one another on the fairgrounds; the French directors of the fair had deliberately arranged this confrontation. While looking over the site in Paris, by chance I stumbled into a room containing the secret sketch of the Soviet pavilion. A sculptured pair of figures 33 metres tall, on a high platform, were striding triumphantly towards the German pavilion. I therefore designed a cubic mass, also elevated on stout pillars, which seemed to be checking this onslaught, while from the cornice of my tower an eagle with a swastika in its claws looked down on the Russian sculptures. I received a gold medal for the building; so did my Soviet colleague.³⁶

But in the 1990s the historian Karen Fiss found a copy of Iofan's plans, annotated in French, in Speer's archive in Germany. It therefore seems more likely that Speer was in fact given the material by Jacques Gréber, the French architect in charge of the Exposition site – who Speer later suggested was sympathetic to his aims – and that it was the starting point for his own work.

There were striking parallels between the exhibits inside the two pavilions. Both Germany and the Soviet Union made use of architectural models in their displays: in the Soviet exhibit, Iofan's 17-foot-high plaster rendering of the Palace of the Soviets had pride of place. The Germans showed Troost's *Haus der Kunst* from Munich.

Both pavilions also included a car; in fact, the Soviet Union had two. One was a ZIS 101, built at the Stalin car factory in Moscow using Buick components. The other was the GAZ limousine, which was exactly like the one that had driven Rykov away to prison; it was a Soviet licence-built Ford that looked like a relic of the past, as indeed it was. The GAZ-M1, for all the pride the Soviets took in its steel bodywork, automatic ignition, adjustable front seats and sun visor, was essentially the same car Ford had been making in Detroit since 1934, but a lot less reliable than the American original. The previous year, Kaganovich had written to Stalin to confess that 'apart from the fact that the plan is not being fulfilled quantitatively, a number of parts being produced are defective and are being allowed onto the assembly line. As a result, the engine, clutch, transmission and rear-axle assembly have major defects, due to which a number of accidents have occurred in Moscow.'³⁷



Planned around a central staircase with a representation of Stalin at its head, the Soviet pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition echoed the Odessa steps that Iofan had known as a child. The car was a Ford, licence-built in the USSR.

The German pavilion's display car was an exotic, streamlined Mercedes-Benz with a V12 engine that looked like a visitation from the future. The racing driver Rudolf Caracciola had driven it at a record-breaking speed of 231 miles per hour (372 kph) on the autobahn between Frankfurt and Heidelberg the previous October. Germany was the clear winner in the car competition between the two pavilions; the German car is in the Mercedes museum to this day.

The most striking difference in how the two states presented themselves was nothing to do with their approaches to architecture or to sculpture, but with Brinkmann and Suetin's exhibition designs. Brinkmann evoked the 19th-century Biedermeier tradition (memorably dubbed 'Hitler's salon' by Fiss); or as *Life* magazine's report put it, 'dignified but dull'.³⁸ Exhibits were corralled into formal glass cases and rooms were lit by brass chandeliers. Adolf Ziegler, curator of the notorious 'Decadent Art' show that would open in Munich shortly after the Paris Exposition, wrote the catalogue for the German pavilion. His own work was represented in Paris by a tapestry version of his painting *The Four Elements*, which had been acquired by Hitler for his house in Munich.

In complete contrast, Suetin's dynamic interior along with Klutis's powerful graphics and photomontages retained the energy of the experimental spirit of suprematism. In this sense, Iofan's pavilion represented a point of inflection between the revolutionary culture of the early years of the Soviet Union and the weight of Kaganovich and Stalin's own taste, caught and balanced between the two.

Frank Lloyd Wright, who visited Paris on his way to Moscow as a guest of the Soviet government for the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects, singled out Iofan's work – ahead of Josep Lluís Sert's pavilion for the Spanish republic, Italy's pavilion by Libera and Piacentini, and Alvar Aalto's Finnish pavilion – as the most impressive piece of architecture in the entire Exposition. He said: 'Here, on the whole, is a master architect's conception that walks away with the Paris Fair.'³⁹ It's not an opinion shared by many contemporary critics. The comparison with Aalto, who like Iofan was born a subject of the Russian empire at the end of the 19th century, is instructive; and when it came to the 1939

New York pavilions, Aalto's building would stand in even sharper contrast to the pomp of Iofan's in Queens. Aalto seemed to be looking forward, able to integrate exhibition and building, while Iofan confessed to being aware of the burden of expectation he carried in representing the Soviet Union.

Although some did express scepticism about the 1937 Soviet pavilion – the art critic Georges Duthuit, son-in-law of Henri Matisse, condemned it as a vulgar dream from Buenos Aires or Monaco, while *Life* magazine called the contents 'kindergarten communist propaganda'⁴⁰ – Paris was a triumph for Iofan. Like Speer, he was awarded a medal by the Exposition organizers, and he found himself continually featured in the Moscow press. Even the always-modest Iofan allowed himself a moment of self-congratulation in a letter he sent home: 'The day before yesterday the pavilion was opened, not just the contents of the pavilion, but its architecture as well is very popular and the French architects whom I meet tell me the same. The pavilion is especially interesting when seen from the side or in profile from the bridge.'⁴¹

Yet he still took a nuanced view of the Paris Exposition itself. Writing in *Pravda* at the end of May, he kept his tone humble: 'An enormous amount of human effort and money has in fact been wasted on concoctions most of which will not stay long. The Exposition site should have been chosen in areas in the suburbs and should have been constructed in such a way that the pavilions could be adapted for various purposes in years to come.'⁴²

On 10 June, Iofan set off from the Gare du Nord on the 42-hour journey home to Moscow. According to Anne-Marie Lotte, newly married to a sculptor from Odessa, who travelled with him, Iofan was shattered by the news that he read in the copy of *Pravda* delivered to the train when it crossed the frontier into the Soviet Union from Poland. Marshal Tukhachevsky and eight Red Army generals had been arrested. A special military tribunal, convened the previous day, had found them guilty of treason. Their death sentences had already been carried out. Iofan had believed that Tukhachevsky was untouchable. Now, it seemed, everyone was in danger. As a public figure, Iofan had to conceal his fears for his personal safety, and that of his family. Like Wright, he was heading to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects, which took place over ten days in Moscow in June 1937. It had been planned for several years at the instigation of Lazar Kaganovich. There were 418 Soviet delegates and 1,000 guests. The venue was the House of the Unions, built in the 18th century as a set of assembly rooms; the largest of its spaces – the Hall of Columns, named for its massive plaster Corinthian columns – had been used as a ballroom in pre-revolutionary times. Now the state used it for important official ceremonies. Lenin's body had lain in state here, and during the show trials, death sentences were pronounced here too.

Iofan, by this time a member of the Congress Presidium, gave a presentation on the Palace of the Soviets. Despite his enthusiasm for Iofan's other work, Wright was unimpressed. While in Moscow, he kept his comments restrained: 'This structure, only proposed, I hope, is good if we take it for a modern version of St George destroying the dragon.'⁴³ But once he was safely back in the USA, he was much more direct about what he called the Soviet Work Palace, writing for the October 1937 issue of *Architectural Record* (also published in the Moscow propaganda magazine *Soviet Russia Today*): 'Iofan produced the most dramatic and successful pavilion at the Paris Exposition, but the Palace of the Soviets is a case of a thoroughly unsuitable tower supported by a badly over-dramatized base.'⁴⁴ He continued in folksy, not to say breezily patronizing style:



Frank Lloyd Wright with Olga and Boris Iofan at a dinner during the first congress of the Soviet Academy of Architecture in June 1937. Their relationship continued during the war when Iofan joined the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and appealed to Wright for help for its fundraising campaign.

I disliked the Soviet Work Palace exceedingly, do so yet – hoped to change the minds entangled with its erection, but the foundations were in.

Said young Jofan, not yet quite disillusioned concerning his highly decorative Soviet Work Palace, ‘never mind Mr Wright. It will improve as we go along. We are studying it continually.’ And I saw proofs of that statement in Jofan’s studio. Who can help loving such liberal great-hearted fellows? What colleague would not do anything he could do under heaven to help them?

And yet the young architect whose design was accepted for this work seven years ago has this year built the most dramatic and successful exhibition building at the Paris Fair. But the Paris Fair building is a low, extended and suitable base for the dramatically realistic sculpture it carries, whereas the Work Palace itself is a case of a thoroughly unsuitable, sadly overdramatized base underneath realistically undramatic sculpture. I admire Jofan’s Paris building as much as I dislike his Soviet work monument, which is saying a great deal.

Jofan! What do you say? Let’s declare it off with the Palace of the Soviets. Let’s have another competition. I will gladly enter one myself and we will see how much you have grown. I believe you could win a second time and save the Soviet Union future humiliation.⁴⁵

Despite his critical words, Iofan’s Palace of the Soviets seems to have lodged somewhere in Wright’s mind. At the very end of his career, it resurfaced in his 1957 design for an opera house in Baghdad attached to a colossal monument in the middle of the Tigris River. It was topped by a representation of the great Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid, grandson of the city’s founder – which would have been as tall as that of Iofan’s Lenin in Moscow.

During the 1937 conference, Iofan, as chairman of the committee for the reception of foreign guests, had to play his part in ensuring that those guests did nothing to embarrass their hosts. The NKVD had vetted every foreign architect before invitations were issued; their speeches were submitted long in advance and carefully translated so as to be officially acceptable in their Russian versions. Even so,

Iofan concluded that there had been some slip-ups, allowing ill-disposed visitors to embarrass the Soviet Union. Antwerp's city architect Emiel van Averbek, who had been responsible for building Europe's first true high-rise in 1926, claimed that he was being followed by so-called 'sleuths' – 'Apparently our agencies abroad did not take such a guest seriously enough,' reported Iofan.⁴⁶ Some of the other invited guests (of whom, not surprisingly, Le Corbusier was one) found reasons to be elsewhere. But at least Iofan had no trouble with Wright, who obligingly referred to 'Comrade Stalin' in his speech. Iofan and Olga took Wright and his Montenegrin, Russian-speaking wife, Olgivanna, to see some of Iofan's work, including the sanatorium at Barvikha; Wright praised its quality.

The Soviet pavilion in Paris was obliterated as soon as the Exposition ended in November 1937, and Mukhina's two figures barely survived. A group of technicians was sent to dismantle the statue. Unaware of the complex nature of its construction, they cut it into random pieces, roughly packaged it and set off on the journey back to Moscow. The only parts that reached Moscow without damage were the two heads and one of the male figure's hands. But both figures were repaired and installed in the grounds of the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition – albeit on an inadequate base that both Mukhina and Iofan would continue attempting to replace for the rest of their lives.

The Soviet pavilion created for the New York World's Fair in 1939 was in many ways a reprise of the Paris Exposition, albeit on a larger scale. Many of the surviving members of the team who had worked in France came together again; the pavilion used some of the same exhibits and many of the same basic architectural elements. Iofan, though he claimed to be reluctant to take on what he described as the heavy responsibility of representing the Soviet Union, was once again selected as its architect after a competition. The process began before Ivan Mezhlauk's arrest: Iofan and six others prepared designs in September 1937. Just three of them went forward when Vasily Burgman took over in May 1938. He wanted a quick decision before a sinking exchange rate made the project even more costly and he selected Karo Alabyan's scheme, but it seems that this decision was immediately countermanded by Stalin. Suetin, who was leading the team working on the interior, had started work on Alabyan's plan, but was told to abandon it and follow Iofan's plan instead.

Alabyan was assigned to work with Iofan, who never committed a word to paper about his thoughts on collaborating with the man who had tried to have him purged. This time they had a much larger site to work with than in Paris, but Iofan used elements familiar from 1937. At the heart of his design was an amphitheatre wrapped in a semicircular sequence of galleries, culminating at each end with a block that paraphrased the Paris pavilion. Each block was guarded by a huge bas-relief medallion: one of Stalin, the other of Lenin. Iofan suggested that the amphitheatre was intended to express the great people's democracy of the USSR, while the connection of the two wings symbolized the union of nations under socialism. The arrangement was a small-scale paraphrase of the framed plaza he had designed as a foreground for the first version of the Palace of the Soviets.

On 7 November 1938 – the twenty-first anniversary of the attack on the Winter Palace that had marked the start of the Bolshevik revolution – a crowd of 500 people stood in the rain in Queens to see Iofan and Konstantin Umansky, Soviet chargé d'affaires in Washington, lay a six foot by three foot black granite cornerstone for the pavilion. Umansky assured his audience that 'Our country wants peace but is ready to resist any aggressor.'⁴⁷ Iofan, who had recently arrived on the *Normandie* from Le Havre, spoke in Russian. He took a more self-deprecating tone, suggesting that people should wait and see what the finished pavilion was like before making up their minds about it.

Nikolai Suetin designed the exhibition, as he had done in Paris. Vyacheslav Andreyev took the place of Vera Mukhina, who had beaten him in the competition for the Paris sculpture two years earlier. He made a single figure, 80 feet high, dubbed 'Joe the Worker', which towered over the pavilion. On top of a 160-foot pylon, the figure hoisted an illuminated five-pointed red Soviet star over Queens. It was made using the same spot-welded stainless steel technique pioneered two years earlier for the pavilion in Paris. Later, Mukhina's worker and farm girl would be adopted as the logo for Mosfilm, the largest Soviet film production company, while Joe the Worker ended up on the label of every souvenir record pressed by Melodiya.



To fabricate his sculpture for the Soviet pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, Vyacheslav Andreyev used the same spot-welding techniques that had been developed to produce Vera Mukhina's sculpture for the 1937 Paris Exposition. Andreyev created a figure of a worker holding up a red star, in tribute to the Statue of Liberty.



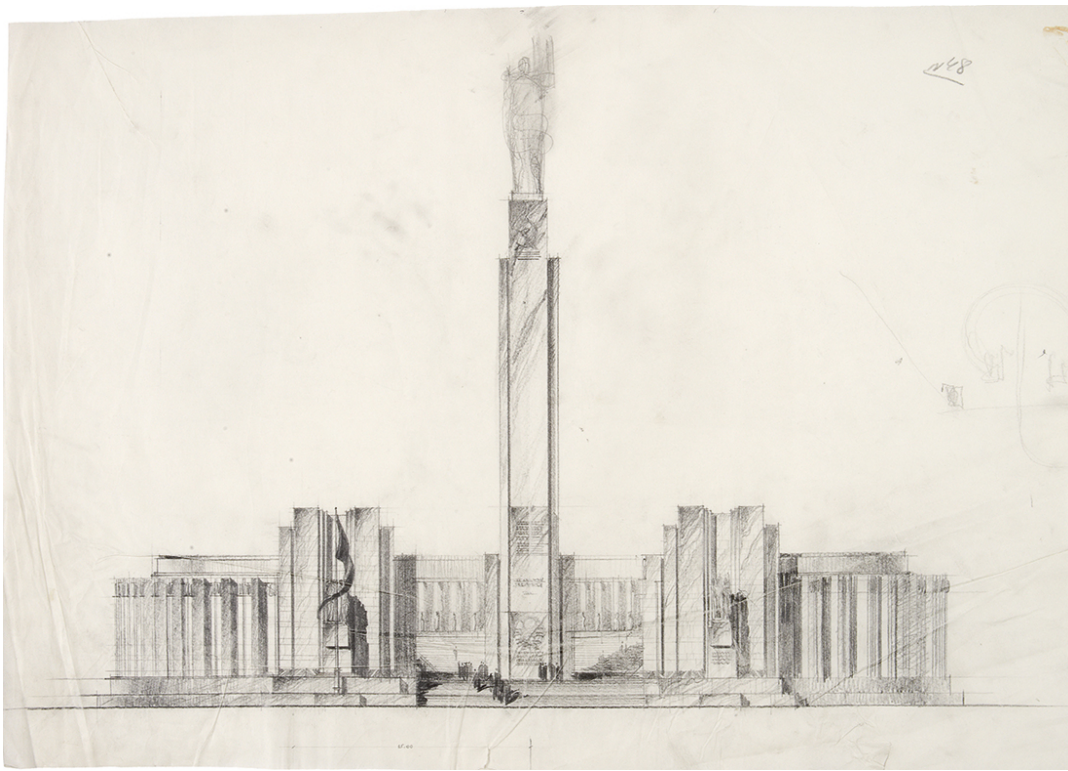
Andreyev's sculpture faithfully followed Iofan's design sketches.



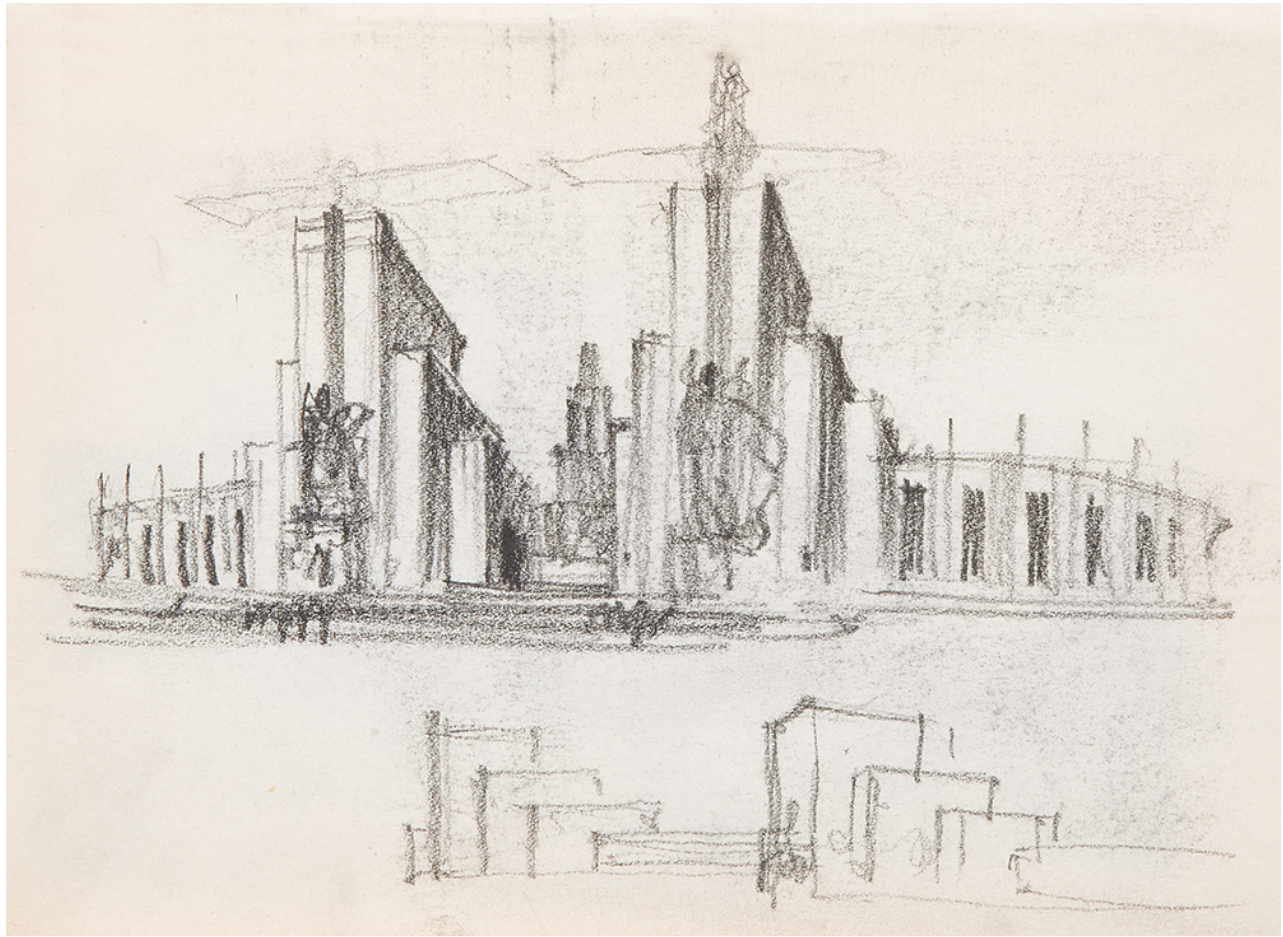
Iofan's Soviet pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, with Andreyev's sculpture in situ. The interior of the pavilion, designed by Nikolai Suetin, resembled an outdoor forum; it contained huge propaganda paintings, a model of the Palace of the Soviets and a full-size replica of a section of the Mayakovskaya station on the Moscow metro.

Iofan did not return to New York for the opening; that was Alabyan's privilege. Once there, he sent a congratulatory telegram to Iofan in Moscow to let him know that the pavilion was ready: 'All exterior work on the construction of the pavilion finished. Stop. Architecture, pavilion and its artwork rave reviews. Stop. May Day congratulations for your great creative victory. Stop. Wish you continued success. Stop. Alabyan.'⁴⁸ Isaak Eigel felt that Iofan was less than happy about the implications of the distinction Alabyan had made between architecture and art.

The pavilion opened with a feast of Russian, Ukrainian and Caucasian food and wine in its 200-seat restaurant, followed by a performance in its cinema. The GAZ limousine exhibited in Paris had not made the trip across the Atlantic and instead of the model aircraft shown in Paris, the actual ANT-25 single-engine long-range plane that had made the first transpolar flight from Moscow to California was displayed outside; its 112-foot wingspan was too much for the interior. Iofan's initial idea had been to place it on the roof of the pavilion, but in the end it was mounted on a pylon in front of the building. The jewelled map of the Soviet Union had been expanded, and Merkurov's bronze Stalin, the enormous paintings and the model of the Palace of the Soviets were all familiar from Paris.



The New York World's Fair of 1939 offered Iofan a larger site to work with than he had had for the 1937 Paris Exposition, allowing him room to expand on similar themes, inspired by Rockefeller Center.



He placed a single figure on a pylon at the centre of the composition.

Before his execution, Ivan Mezhlausk had produced a comprehensive report on the details of what had worked in Paris and what had not. It called for more of what would today be called ‘interactivity’. One result of this was the addition in 1939 of a diorama that showed in stages the transformation of a pre-revolutionary Russian village into a Soviet collective farm, using mirrors and lights to make the church seem to disappear and the manor house transform into a rest home. There was also a full-size slice of the Mayakovskaya station on the Moscow metro.

While the 1939 pavilion and its contents recalled 1937 in Paris, the political context in which they existed was entirely different. Germany had abandoned the idea of building a pavilion in New York when it became clear just how hostile its reception would be. The New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, a bitter critic of Hitler, had suggested constructing a Chamber of Horrors climaxing with ‘a figure of that brown-shirted fanatic who is now menacing the peace of the world’.⁴⁹ In response, Goebbels used his mouthpiece *Der Angriff* to attack La Guardia, labelling him a ‘Jewish ruffian’ who conspired with his ‘communist Jewish gangster comrades’.⁵⁰

Sprawling over 500 acres of reclaimed rubbish tips in Queens, the World’s Fair had been four years in the making. It took in everything from an original version of the Magna Carta, on show in the British pavilion, to the National Cash Register Company’s contribution of a cash register as big as an office block. But if Paris had been an architectural confrontation between Germany and the Soviet Union, the sharpest confrontation in Queens was between the Soviet system and consumerism run riot, represented by the launch of the world’s first pair of nylon stockings in the DuPont pavilion. It was the unlikeliest conjunction: a celebration of Stalin and all his works in the midst of suburban America, and a blithely optimistic view of a world of plenty.

The fair's ostensible theme of 'the world of tomorrow' was most directly addressed by Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama pavilion. This represented the future as seen by General Motors: an America modelled in extraordinary detail, with tens of thousands of minute cars moving along the freeways that criss-crossed its varied landscapes. The future that intruded ever more insistently, however, was one of war – a war that during the Paris Exposition people had feared was on its way, and that had now broken out.

Six months earlier, Hitler had marched his armies into Prague and dismembered Czechoslovakia. The words of the 17th-century philosopher John Comenius, spelled out in foot-high letters, were added to the façade of Czechoslovakia's never-completed national pavilion: *After the Tempest of Wrath Has Passed the Rule of Thy Country Will Return to Thee O Czech People*. The Polish pavilion was guarded by an equestrian statue of Wladyslaw II, a sword in each hand, commemorating his 15th-century victory over the Teutonic knights. After the World's Fair opened, his memory was not enough to deter Germany and the Soviet Union from their joint invasion of the Polish republic.

Hitler and Stalin had by now signed their non-aggression pact, which included secret clauses about their division of Polish territory and gave Stalin a free hand in the Baltic and Romania. This political shift was immediately reflected in the Soviet pavilion, where a programme of anti-Nazi films was abruptly cancelled once the terms of the pact became public. In December, with Soviet troops entering Poland, Finland and the Baltic states, it was decided that the pavilion would not be opened for another season alongside those of the victims of Soviet aggression. Instead, it was swiftly dismantled and the exhibits were shipped home. Iofan wrote to Stalin, urging him to have the pavilion rebuilt in Moscow, but his efforts were in vain.



The slogans and the political imagery of the Soviet pavilion were in sharp contrast to the celebration of consumerism of much of the rest of the 1939 New York World's Fair. When war broke out in Europe, Stalin had the pavilion demolished.

6

War

Despite the enmity between Europe's two most powerful dictatorships, Hitler's unprovoked attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 came as a shock to Stalin. Two years earlier, he had sent Vyacheslav Molotov to Berlin to negotiate a non-aggression pact with Germany. For the Nazis, Molotov was a more acceptable choice of emissary than his Jewish predecessor as foreign minister, Maksim Litvinov. As soon as the pact was signed, Stalin radically reordered the direction of Soviet propaganda: abruptly, Nazi Germany was no longer presented as a pariah.



The heroes of the Great Patriotic War, sculpted in plaster and later painted in bronze, guard Iofan's Baumanskaya metro station. The German invasion stopped construction on the Palace of the Soviets site, but the metro was seen as part of the war effort.

The pact gave Hitler the freedom to attack first Poland and then western Europe, confident that he would not be simultaneously taking on the Soviet Union. Hitler and Stalin coordinated their forces, dividing the Baltic states and eastern Europe between themselves. While Stalin knew very well that

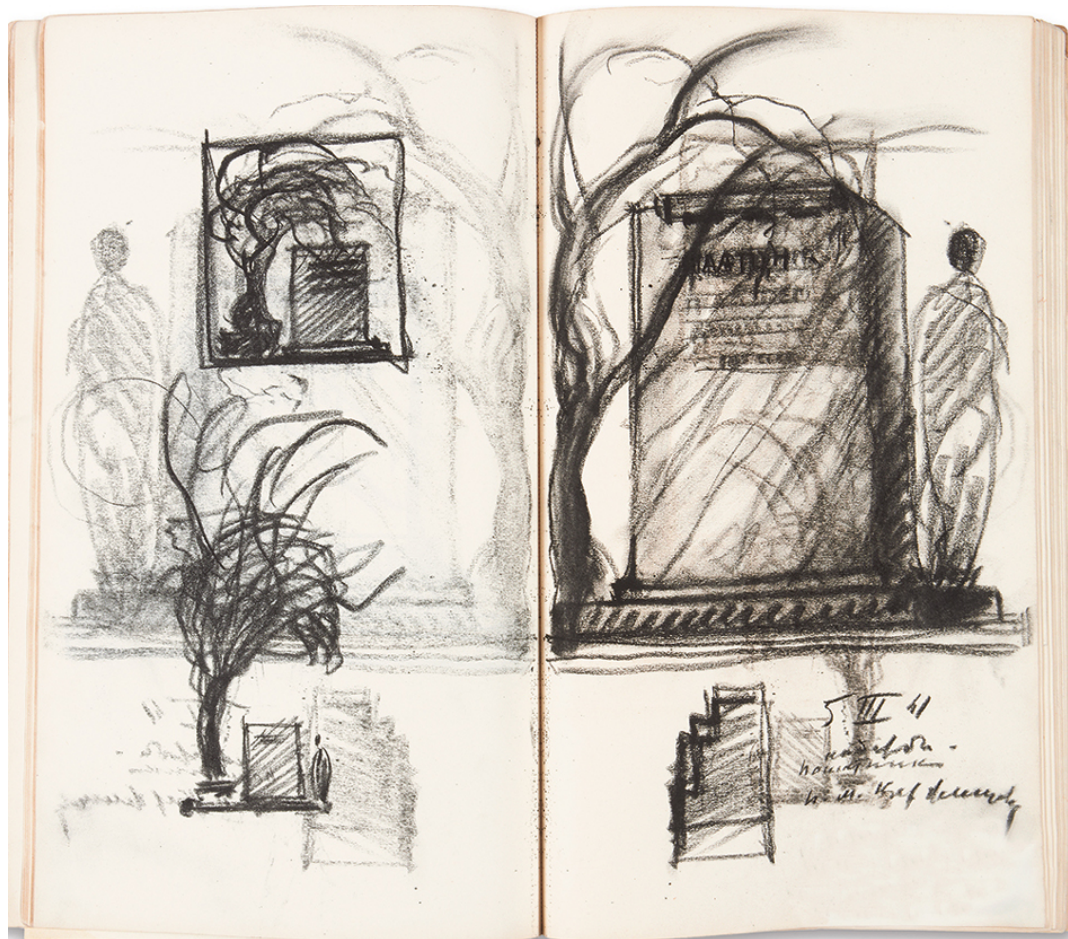
there would one day be a military confrontation with Germany, he was certain that it was still some way off.

Hitler, on the other hand, regarded the agreement as vital for his own strategy but also knew that it would give Stalin time to prepare for war with Germany – and to repair the damage his purge of the Red Army leadership had done to Soviet armed forces. The more time Hitler gave Stalin, the stronger his enemy would become. If his long-term plan to subjugate Russia was to stand any chance of success, Hitler could not afford to wait for long to abandon the pact.

The first wave of German bombers took off from airfields in East Prussia at a quarter past three on the morning of 22 June 1941, targeting Soviet airfields and catching their planes while they were still on the ground. German artillery opened up a barrage targeted on the Red Army's frontier defences. The gunfire marked the start of Hitler's biggest single military operation in the course of the entire war. More than three million German troops and their Axis allies began to move across the length of the 1,800-mile border, running all the way from Finland in the north through Latvia, the German-occupied part of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, to Romania in the south.

Because Stalin had refused to believe that war was imminent, Soviet forces were entirely unprepared for an attack. This was despite urgent warnings from British intelligence and from Stalin's own spies, as well as the obvious signs of military preparations in Germany. Three invading German army groups brushed aside Soviet defences and rapidly moved into Belorussia, western Russia and Ukraine. During the first days of fighting the Soviets lost huge numbers of men – 600,000 were killed, captured or wounded in just a week – while the Germans advanced 200 miles and destroyed 4,000 Soviet aircraft.

The leadership in Moscow was paralysed. Communication with the front line was severed, leaving Stalin struggling to understand the scale of what was happening and, at first, with no strategy to halt the German advance. Leningrad was quickly surrounded by Germans and Finns, the start of a twenty-seven-month siege that lasted until the end of January 1944. Moscow was fortunate that a German delay gave it some time to prepare its defences: the capital had been a primary objective of the German advance, but Hitler paused before making a direct attack to concentrate on securing Ukraine. As a result, German tanks did not launch their attack on the capital until early October, well behind the original schedule.



Studies for a memorial, from Iofan's sketchbook dating from early 1941, just before the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Iofan was as skilled with pencil and charcoal as he was with watercolours and ink and wash.

By the time they were in position, weather conditions were worsening. First mud, then snow and ice made movement difficult and caused weapons and vehicles to malfunction. A Soviet air defence system was in place around Moscow, with spotters positioned forty miles from the city centre to provide early warning of approaching aircraft. The city was ringed by trenches dug by hand by tens of thousands of civilians. There were barbed-wire barricades in the streets, tethered barrage balloons, batteries of searchlights, and anti-aircraft guns mounted on rooftops.

Work on the Palace of the Soviets stopped within hours of the Germans crossing the border 1,000 miles away. The construction workers and most of Iofan's architectural team were drafted into an inexperienced, under-equipped makeshift army to await the arrival of the apparently unstoppable Germans. About 600 of Iofan's architects, sculptors, mural painters, engineers and craftsmen volunteered for the Fifth Division of the Moscow people's militia. A similar number were sent to dig trenches. Very few of them survived the battle.

All of the city's resources, from fire engines and taxis to factory kitchens, were turned over to the war effort. Iofan's site office became a logistics centre, delivering equipment and resources for Moscow's defences. The palace's high-grade steel was put to new uses: the beams stacked on the ground at the offsite factory on the Lenin Hills were quickly fashioned into tank traps to guard Moscow. When that supply was used up a decision was taken to sacrifice the palace itself and dismantle its structural frame, already 60 feet high. This was a laborious process that took until 1942, but at a time when Soviet steel production was restricted by German bombing it provided a valuable raw material for building bridges and other strategic structures.

Iofan's two other live projects in Moscow were also halted. Work stopped only temporarily at the Spartakovskaya metro station, but an imposing new headquarters building for *Izvestiya* – a handsome

tribute to Rockefeller Center, located near the Kievsky railway station – was abandoned.

In order to ensure that they could still produce the munitions required to continue the fight, more than 500 of Moscow's strategically vital factories began to relocate far to the east. Preparations were also made for the most precious pieces in the city's museum collections to be moved out of reach of the invaders. The first artefact to depart was the embalmed body of Lenin, removed from its Red Square mausoleum in conditions of complete secrecy just eleven days after German troops crossed the border. The idea of Lenin's corpse falling into the hands of the Nazis was evidently even more unthinkable than the occupation of the capital; Russia had, after all, survived Napoleon's capture of Moscow in 1812, but the loss of such a precious relic would be seen as the end of the Soviet Union. The body was loaded onto a closely guarded railway carriage, equipped to maintain the temperature control system and complex alchemy needed to prevent the corruption of Lenin's flesh. It was dispatched by special train to Tyumen in Siberia, arriving four days later, where it remained until the end of the war. Plans were also drawn up for a mass evacuation of the living political and military leadership, as well as selected deserving civilians.

As the city braced itself for the German onslaught, Iofan was given the task of devising a camouflage scheme to disrupt the anticipated Luftwaffe bombing campaign. German aircraft, operating from forward bases set up behind the advancing front line, were in range of Moscow by the end of July. Iofan's plan was to disorientate the enemy by concealing major landmarks and creating ghost targets to draw their bombs towards vacant sites, where they would do less damage.

By 14 July, he and his assistants had worked out a plan to make Moscow unrecognizable from the air using a mixture of flat paintwork, plywood structures and camouflage netting. Iofan prepared drawings of the Kremlin and the buildings surrounding it to guide the military teams that carried out his scheme, supervised by architects from his studio in order to ensure that no lasting damage was done to historically important buildings. Soldiers with climbing skills were tasked with painting the Kremlin's spires and the 16th-century, 266-foot belfry tower of Ivan the Great. Swirling coloured patterns were used to break up the buildings' silhouettes. The effect was much like the jagged dazzle patterns used for warships but with a colour palette more appropriate for an urban setting, including shades of dark green, orange and brick red.

Although Lenin had vacated his mausoleum, his departure was kept secret in the interests of morale. Camouflaging the red marble structure, which remained a recognizable target, would help to maintain the illusion that it still contained its precious occupant. Iofan (who certainly knew that the tomb was empty) built a cluster of two- and three-storey buildings with pitched roofs and dummy windows on top of the mausoleum, making it completely disappear. The Kremlin wall behind it was also made to vanish. Paint was used to suggest a terrace of apartment buildings of varying heights, while timber and canvas cornices and parapets completed the illusion. The Troitskaya tower, the tallest in the Kremlin, had its gold star (installed by Kaganovich and Stalin seven years earlier) painted black; its spires were treated with contrasting patterns and the lower sections sprouted timber and canvas awnings to give the impression of residential buildings. Its gold leaf domes were painted black too, while the façades were given dummy windows and interlocking clusters of tiled roofs. The neoclassical riding stable in the Kremlin moat vanished under a new coat of paint that made it look like a complex of several smaller buildings. Convincing-looking 'ghost houses' were built out of plywood all around central Moscow, filling in squares and parks to give them the appearance of built-up areas for the bombers to target.

The Bolshoi's façade was repainted, with the fly tower split up by bold geometric patterns to break up its apparent mass. Iofan even worked on the Moskva River to distort the apparent geography of the city. He built a fake bridge across it in plywood and moored barges carrying mock-up houses to conceal the most recognizable bends in the river, hoping to confuse German navigators trying to locate targets from their aeronautical charts.

Moscow faced its first air raid on the night of 21–22 July. Flying 250 miles from an airstrip at Smolensk, 220 German planes attacked the city. Their crews, many of whom had taken part in the Battle of Britain, had experience of flying long distances to reach heavily defended targets. During the early stages of the battle Moscow was out of range of the German fighter escorts that would have been

needed to protect bombers flying in daylight, so the first raids took place at night. The pilots dropped flares to illuminate their targets, but it was difficult for them to distinguish dummy buildings from the real thing. The Kremlin emerged with only light damage the following morning, a result that encouraged Moscow's defence committee to accelerate the completion of Iofan's scheme.

Soviet night fighters and anti-aircraft batteries very likely did more to deflect German bombs than Iofan's camouflage, but it was good for civilian morale to see it in place. His other duty in Moscow during the summer of 1941 was a political one. Despite Stalin's lifelong anti-Semitic prejudices, once the Nazis attacked the USSR he authorized the establishment of a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee under the auspices of the government's propaganda department. Its first dozen members were prominent figures from the arts, sciences and the Soviet military, including Iofan and Sergei Eisenstein, and their primary objective was to rally support for the Soviet Union – both financial and political – from Jewish communities around the world. They began with an international appeal for support in the Soviet fight against the Nazis.

The committee was chaired by Solomon Mikhoels, the actor and director who had been Iofan's friend since 1925. As instructed by the Communist Party, Iofan accepted his invitation to become a founder member, as did another old friend, the physicist Pyotr Kapitsa. Within four weeks of the German invasion, the committee organized its first public rally to witness the signing of its appeal to the global Jewish community. Its members made speeches in Yiddish, Russian and English that were broadcast on Radio Moscow and relayed around the world. Iofan took part in the broadcast, using his architectural work to establish a connection with his audience overseas.

Comrade Stalin, one of the greatest of humanists, teaches us that the most precious treasure on Earth is man. The Soviet constitution is based on the fraternity and equality of all peoples, and Americans who visited the New York World's Fair could see how the Soviet pavilion, both in its architecture and its exhibits, sought to demonstrate the equality and friendship of all the peoples of the USSR.

In the Soviet Union, the national culture of every one of its peoples is respected and its development encouraged. But in Germany, the dregs of humanity who have seized power have been advocating and for several years practising the oppression, slaughter and deliberate extermination of a whole people by the most bestial methods. They proclaim the right of one nation to dominate all other nations. Hitlerism has driven from Germany her finest painters, sculptors, writers, architects and scientists. Among these talented people, large numbers are Jews. Hitlerism tramples under foot and, with all its unimaginative barbarous hatred, is striving to destroy human culture, not excluding German culture, created by generations of the German people. And now the filthy claws of the fascist bandits are endeavouring to grip at our great country. But the great brotherhood of the people of the USSR, contemptuous of death, have risen as one man to defend the freedom and independence of their country, as well as that of other nations and countries. This is the beginning of the end of criminal Hitlerism. The people of all countries must exert their utmost effort until Hitlerism has been crushed. This refers in particular to the Jews, whom Hitler is trying to exterminate brutally, deliberately. All freedom-loving peoples should devote all their strength, nay, their lives, to one single aim, the defeat of fascism.¹

For Stalin, the committee's primary task was to help bring the USA into the war by encouraging American Jews to lobby President Roosevelt to intervene. After the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, however, this was no longer necessary. What Stalin wanted then was to persuade the British and the Americans to open a second front against Germany in order to ease the pressure on the USSR. His second priority was to raise money.

Mikhoels framed the appeal to what he called 'brother Jews' everywhere:

Along with all the citizens of our great country, our sons are engaged in battle, dedicating their lives and blood to the Great Patriotic War of liberation being waged by the Soviet people. Our

mothers themselves are sending their sons into this battle for justice, for the great cause of our free Soviet homeland. Our fathers are fighting alongside their sons and brothers against the enemy who is ravaging and annihilating the people. And you, our brothers, remember that here in our country, on the battlefields, your fate as well as the fate of the countries you live in is being decided. Don't be lulled by the thought that Hitler's brutal savagery will spare you.²

Another member of the committee, the writer Ilya Ehrenburg (one of the 'literary prostitutes' scorned by George Orwell), put it even more emotively: 'There is no ocean behind which you can hide....Your peaceful sleep will be disturbed by the cries of Leah from Ukraine, Rachel from Minsk, Sarah from Bialystok – they are weeping over their slaughtered children.'³ In Britain, the Anglo-Soviet parliamentary committee published the speeches as a pamphlet, titled 'Jews Against the Nazis'.

Albert Einstein responded to the appeal and suggested to Maksim Litvinov, who was by this time the Soviet ambassador to Washington, that the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee send a delegation to the USA to make their case. Litvinov relayed this suggestion back to the USSR. The committee drew up a list of five names that included Iofan, but this was whittled back to just two: Mikhoels and Itsik Fefer, a well-regarded poet who was also an active informant for the Soviet secret police.

Iofan drew on his personal relationship with Frank Lloyd Wright in making an appeal to the American public. He wrote to Wright asking for his help in mobilizing support for the Soviet Union. Wright replied encouragingly: 'Yes my dear Iofan, we take our stand together against fascist barbarians, but let our stand be against all forms of barbarism.'⁴ After receiving Iofan's letter, Wright contacted the filmmaker Joseph Losey, who had spent time in Moscow in 1935 and was now working for the American Russian War Relief agency. Losey wanted Wright to participate in a rally at Madison Square Garden.

Mikhoels and Fefer spent seven months touring Britain, Canada, America and Mexico during 1942 and 1943. Visiting Chicago for a rally immediately after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, Mikhoels attracted a 50,000-strong crowd. He shared a platform with Paul Robeson, he lobbied Charlie Chaplin and Thomas Mann and, in the end, he secured \$46 million in donations – the equivalent of \$700 million today.

By the time Mikhoels and Fefer returned to Moscow, German forces were already in retreat after their defeat at Stalingrad. Evidence of Nazi atrocities from the earliest days of the invasion were now coming to light: in Odessa, 20,000 people had been killed in the streets during a horrifying genocidal massacre in 1941. In Kiev, the murders had taken place out of sight, but the discovery of mass graves at Babii Yar ravine on the outskirts of the city revealed the fate of tens of thousands of men, women and children. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee recorded evidence of these atrocities as part of its campaign for eventual justice for the victims.

Stalin saw this as evidence of disloyalty. While he still needed the continued support of the Western democracies, he allowed the committee to continue its work – but once the war was over he unleashed a wave of repression against Soviet Jews that was every bit as shameful and violent as the purges of 1937. At first, anti-Semitism was presented as a rejection of Jewish nationalism. As long as aspects of the committee's work were still regarded as useful, the party's strategy was to change the JAFC leadership. A report submitted in May 1947 by the foreign relations department of the Communist Party Central Committee concluded: 'The basic defect in the work of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee at the present time consists in the fact that it has acquired an increasingly nationalistic Zionist character and is in fact promoting and strengthening the Jewish reactionary bourgeois nationalistic movement abroad and fostering Zionist attitudes among a certain part of the Jewish population in the USSR.'⁵ With the aim of what was called 'the normalizing of the situation in the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and converting it into an efficient organ for the mobilization of democratic Jewish forces abroad',⁶ it recommended replacing the majority of the leadership. It proposed the appointment of Iofan as one of four possible candidates judged sufficiently loyal to take the place of Mikhoels. But Stalin came to

believe that the committee was engaged in espionage on behalf of America, and he took extreme measures.

Early in 1948, Mikhoels – a holder of the Order of Lenin, a People's Artist of the USSR and a Stalin Prize laureate – was murdered in a house near Minsk belonging to the head of the Belorussian NKVD, following Stalin's precisely detailed instructions. A public trial, even one about whose outcome there could be no doubt, would have been too embarrassing. Mikhoels' body and that of his assistant were dumped at the side of a road, and Stalin's police then drove over the corpses with a truck to suggest that they had died in a traffic accident. Grotesquely, after Mikhoels' death was confirmed, Stalin gave him a state funeral; at the same time, he awarded medals to his killers.

The future of the JAFK was in the balance. Stalin eventually decided to liquidate the committee altogether, arresting many of its members. After prolonged imprisonment, accompanied by interrogation, periods of torture and a secret trial in 1952, thirteen of them were shot dead. Fefer's earlier activities as a KGB informer did not save him. Stalin's entourage also claimed at this time to have uncovered a plot by leading Jewish doctors to poison the Soviet leadership – part of a fictitious Zionist conspiracy that was supposedly being funded by American and British intelligence agencies.

Iofan and Kapitsa were among the very few members of the committee to survive, but they did not entirely escape Stalin's vengeance. Kapitsa, whom Stalin believed to be in the pay of Britain's intelligence services, was placed under house arrest from 1946 until after the leader's death. Kapitsa had fallen out with Beria over the Soviet nuclear weapons programme. Khrushchev eventually restored him to the directorship of the research institute and he later won the Nobel Prize.

Shortly after Kapitsa's confinement to his dacha, Iofan was sacked from an important project to design a new building for Moscow State University on the Lenin Hills. This commission had a scale and a prominence that would have gone some way towards compensating him for the disappointment of the stillborn Palace of the Soviets. Remarkably, though, Iofan survived this purge – just as he had survived the fire at the House on the Embankment and his denunciation for consorting with Trotskyite fascist Zinovievites and the Gestapo. As of 1953, the year of Stalin's death, he remained an architectural academician and was still being consulted on such politically sensitive issues as where best to site a new statue of Stalin in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. He carried out this task with fellow academician Ivan Fomin, although he confessed that he exercised his judgment without ever having visited the city.

But back in 1941, Iofan and his work on the Palace of the Soviets were still seen as so important to the state that he, along with a small team of assistants and artists, was granted a privileged place in the contingency plans being drawn up for use in the event of Germany occupying Moscow. After Hitler's diversion to the south, the fight for the city – code-named 'Operation Typhoon' by the Germans – started on 2 October.

Each side poured over a million soldiers into battle on the night of 15 October, when the city was in danger of being cut off in a vast encirclement trapping huge numbers of Soviet troops. German tanks were within twelve miles of the Kremlin, and a reconnaissance patrol got as close as six miles – near enough for them to have had a good view of the Palace of the Soviets, had it been completed on schedule. The order was given to evacuate the party leadership and the military high command 600 miles east, to the city of Samara. Stalin's armoured train was readied at the station, with specialized communications equipment and his most secret files already on board. But at the last moment – in the well-founded belief that to abandon the city would be to trigger a national collapse from which there could be no recovery – Stalin decided to stay in Moscow. While he remained behind, the city's scientists, engineers, writers and artists boarded the overcrowded evacuation trains at Kazan Station and were dispatched to a range of cities in the east. Before the end of the year, almost two million people had left the city.

Many of Moscow's citizens panicked when the evacuation order was made public, and the city experienced a breakdown of law and order on a scale not seen since the revolution. Tens of thousands besieged the railway stations, desperate for a place on a train to take them east, while others blocked every road out of the city. The NKVD confronted mobs of looters and army deserters and shot to kill. The panic subsided when the military situation eased a little. On 5 December the Soviets counter-

attacked, eventually succeeding in pushing the Germans back 150 miles. It was a turning point in the war, and by the following spring the threat to Moscow had lifted.

In December, Iofan and Olga were evacuated almost 1,000 miles east of Moscow to Sverdlovsk (known now as Yekaterinburg, as it was called before the revolution). Situated in western Siberia, at the geographical boundary between Europe and Asia, the city was established in the late 18th century as a combination of metalwork factory and fortress. In 1918 it had been the scene of the execution of the tsar and most of his family. After the civil war, Stalin made Sverdlovsk one of a number of centres for rapid industrial development, and its population grew from 140,000 in 1926 to almost 500,000 at the time the Iofans arrived. The expansion saw a wave of constructivist housing and factory buildings.

In 1941 it was chosen as a destination for two trainloads of masterpieces from the Hermitage museum. A third train was cancelled when Leningrad's encirclement was complete. Even the most privileged evacuees from Moscow faced a long and daunting journey to get there. At the start, their trains were still in range of the machine guns of Stuka dive bombers; further east, they were subject to endless waits in sidings to allow westbound troop trains taking reinforcements to Moscow to pass.

On his arrival in Sverdlovsk, Iofan would have noticed the imposing district headquarters of the army staff, a newly built classical structure. Its main façade was dominated by a frieze depicting Soviet tanks and aircraft, with a representation of the Palace of the Soviets carved into the stone as its centrepiece. He and Olga were allocated a modest double room in the Bolshoi Ural, a massive hotel complex built in constructivist style in the 1930s.

Iofan was appointed head of the Ural division of the Academy of Architecture and established a studio in the city to carry out his professional duties. He began work on the expansion of an aluminium smelting plant (vital for the war effort) and drew up a masterplan for a new district in Magnitogorsk, a city laid out a decade earlier by Ernst May and his team of German architects and planners. But even at this moment of extreme crisis with nothing less than national survival at stake, his priority was the Palace of the Soviets, regardless of the fact that what little of the building had emerged above ground had already been dismantled.

Iofan wrote to Molotov asking him to release key members of his design team from military service so that they could join him in Sverdlovsk, and to secure more studio space and living quarters for them. According to the unusually frank diaries of the very well-informed artist Eugene Lanceray, Stalin personally authorized a three-million-rouble budget for Iofan to revisit the design and transform it into an expression of Soviet victory. Lanceray, one of the team of artists working on the interior of the Palace of the Soviets, had a wary relationship with Iofan, whom he called sly. Sergei Merkurov was also in Sverdlovsk, continuing to refine his representation of Lenin as the giant crowning feature of the palace. The sculptor Vyacheslav Andreyev, with whom Iofan had worked on the Soviet pavilion in New York, was there too, along with the architect Yakov Belopolsky, model-maker Fyodor Chelnokov and a small team of architectural assistants.

Belopolsky had been a brilliant student in Moscow and had joined Iofan aged just twenty-five, in time to work on the New York pavilion. He would go on to establish an important career of his own: immediately after the war he won the competition to design the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin's Treptower Park, and he would also design the International University in Moscow. In the Khrushchev era Belopolsky became one of the leaders of Soviet modernism, but continued to acknowledge Iofan's influence. Iofan, he said, had once told him: 'Our architecture should be dynamic, driven and, at the same time, simple and monumental'⁷ – advice he claimed that he always followed. His professional loyalty, however, could not be counted on, and after the war he used the teams Iofan had built up to work on his own projects in competition with his former mentor.

'The task that we are engaged on is large and interesting. I am working with great interest on the design of the Palace of the Soviets,' Iofan wrote during this period. 'Our small team is gradually becoming more closely involved in this work. It is necessary once more to review and redo a great deal. It is obvious that in our compositional work we cannot ignore the fact of the Great Patriotic War.'⁸ The three-volume base of the palace was consequently reduced to two, and the giant statue of Lenin was

transformed. It would now be dressed in a flowing overcoat rather than the lounge suit Merkurov had proposed in his original version, with the baggy trousers that had been the subject of so much derision in 1939.

By September 1943, the team had completed a large model of the palace that became known as the 'Sverdlovsk variant'. The Iofans returned to Moscow that year and lived for a time at the Barvikha sanatorium while the House on the Embankment was repaired after bomb damage. Despite the disruption of the war, Iofan was able to complete two projects in Moscow before the German defeat. They share an austere but refined classical language more severe than his American-influenced Paris pavilion.

The first of these was the Baumanskaya metro station, which had been designed in 1938 and finally opened in January 1944. The outbreak of war had triggered a radical change in its decorative scheme; it had originally been called Spartakovskaya, in tribute to Spartacus's leadership of the slave revolt in Rome. The platform concourse deep underground was to be spanned by a coffered Roman barrel vault decorated with circular rosettes, lined by niches containing figures of gladiators and athletes. Owing to the changed circumstances, though, the station was given a more contemporary political theme celebrating Russian rather than Roman heroes. It was renamed for Nikolai Bauman, a Bolshevik agitator killed during anti-tsarist riots, and the sculpture on the concourse was adapted accordingly.



Unlike the post-war so-called ‘Seven Sisters’ high-rises that were built in a uniform style, each metro station had its own character. Iofan’s 1938 design for Baumanskaya reflected his enthusiasm for Roman classicism.



Iofan designed Baumanskaya station with references to its original name, Spartakovskaya. The change is reflected in the iconography of the sculpture: Soviet fighters, rather than Roman slave-revolutionaries.

Passengers today are still confronted by a couple of near life-size Red Army soldiers somewhat alarmingly brandishing machine guns that protrude menacingly from deep niches made of porphyry. One is in snow camouflage; another is in partisan battle dress, while a female construction worker carries a jackhammer. Other Soviet heroes portrayed below ground include a polar aviator and a writer. They were cast in plaster by Vyacheslav Andreyev and later finished in bronze paint. At street level, four giant rectangular fluted columns create a vestibule decorated with a bas-relief that shows an assortment of soldiers and workers against a backdrop of the Kremlin. But the two classical sculptures memorializing Spartacus originally planned for the façade were abandoned, leaving the blank walls more sombre than Iofan had envisaged.



Baumanskaya is one of Moscow's busiest metro stations. It emerged from a recent restoration looking pristine. Its appearance is more severe than Iofan had originally intended: he had planned a sculptural celebration of Spartacus flanking the entrance.

Iofan's other project completed in 1944 was designed for Pyotr Kapitsa, his friend and fellow member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Kapitsa was a brilliant physicist specializing in magnetic fields and the behaviour of atomic particles at low temperatures; later, in 1978, he won the Nobel Prize. Though born in Russia, he had been Ernest Rutherford's doctoral student at Cambridge and then worked with him at the university's Cavendish Laboratory. He had unwisely made the decision to come to the Soviet Union with his wife in 1934, leaving their two children in England. It was intended to be only a short visit, to attend a conference and see his mother. Even so, Kapitsa took the precaution of securing a written guarantee in advance that he would be allowed to return to Britain.



Stalin prevented the brilliant physicist Pyotr Kapitsa from going back to his laboratory in Cambridge. His consolation was this new building for his research institute in Moscow, designed in chaste classical style by his friend Iofan.

But Stalin wanted the prestige of being able to claim one of the world's most gifted scientists as a loyal citizen of the Soviet Union, just as he had wanted Maksim Gorky to return to Moscow from exile in Italy. In Kapitsa's case, Stalin was also attracted by the potential military applications of his research. Kapitsa's exit visa was cancelled and Stalin gave Ivan Mezhlauk the job of persuading him to announce his 'voluntary' return to the USSR. 'Let Kapitsa know that we will do everything necessary to create desirable conditions. We'll build a special institute for him, but explain to him firmly that he cannot return to Britain. We won't let him leave the country,' Stalin told Mezhlauk.⁹

Faced with the options of jail or cooperation, Kapitsa realized that he had little choice but to stay and make the best of it. He asked for a new building that could recreate the intimate, club-like atmosphere of the Mond Laboratory in Cambridge, built for him by the Royal Society and completed just a year earlier. Kapitsa, whose father had been a civil engineer, was evidently fascinated by building. In Cambridge he had commissioned Eric Gill to carve a crocodile into the exterior wall of the new laboratory, a reference to his playful nickname for Rutherford.

The new institute was built in two phases. Stalin provided a site on the Lenin Hills that had originally been offered to the Americans for their embassy. Iofan's design was in an austere and refined neoclassical idiom, not dissimilar to that of the Baumanskaya metro station. It included a detached home for Kapitsa and his family, accommodation for his research staff, and the laboratories. The earlier part, which was ready for occupation during 1936, has an entrance marked by four fluted square columns. A second building housing another complex of laboratories was started in 1944, a strictly symmetrical and windowless pavilion with a square-columned façade.

In the early months of 1943, once the Germans had begun to fall back, the main focus for the Soviet architectural elite was to make good the damage done to towns and cities that had until recently been battlefields. In March, Iofan, Shchusev and Alabyan were flown into Stalingrad in a military transport plane. The city had been turned into a wasteland by five months of continuous house-to-house fighting

that had ended only six weeks earlier, when Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus had declined Hitler's suggestion that he commit suicide and instead had surrendered to the Red Army. After the battle ended, the Soviets counted 250,000 German and Romanian corpses. The Axis forces were believed to have lost as many as 800,000 killed, wounded or captured; Soviet losses were even higher. A city that before the war had been home to 450,000 people had seen 48,200 buildings completely destroyed. Iofan and his colleagues arrived to find a hellish, ruined landscape with only some 1,500 civilian survivors clinging to the rubble. They were invited to reflect on how best to rebuild.

Iofan was shocked by what he saw – the destruction had left the city completely unrecognizable. Piles of rubble made many streets impassable. There were pyramids of bricks and heaps of masonry where the civic centre had once stood. Here and there he found cracked white enamel signs bearing the names of what had been the city's streets, left there by considerate sappers from the army bomb squads who had cleared Stalingrad of mines and unexploded munitions. The only traces that made it possible to guess at the former layout of the city, spread out for miles along the banks of the Volga River, were the shattered foundations of lost buildings. Rows of projecting brick chimney stacks and what Iofan vividly described as the 'black skeletons of the shot-to-pieces, fire-eaten trees' were all that had survived the firestorms.¹⁰

More than a year later, little had changed. *Izvestiya's* correspondent reported of the city that 'All its buildings were burned and destroyed. The stone framework of Stalingrad is ghostly. Through the holes and fissures everywhere you see the sky translucent, the floating clouds, birds flying over the Volga. The rays of the setting sun reflected on the bare layers of bricks and mortar make the whole city appear rosy and light, gleaming with a cold flame of memory.'¹¹

Iofan, Shchusev and Alabyan were each invited by the Architectural Academy in Moscow to prepare a strategy to rebuild Stalingrad. Their brief was to connect Stalingrad with its river. A new boulevard was to take the place of the swathe of destruction. This boulevard would have a new civic centre at one end, with a theatre planned as its centrepiece, and a sequence of monuments at the other.

After Alabyan's plan was selected, Iofan took part in a second competition to design a monumental city landmark. The brief specified a memorial to the war dead and a tribute to Stalin. The jury criticized both Iofan and Lev Rudnev's submissions for spending too much time commemorating the war rather than celebrating Stalin, and neither was selected. It would take another twenty years to realize Stalingrad's monument, which ultimately took the form of a gigantic female figure in cast concrete with a raised sword. It was the work of Evgeny Viktorovich Vuchetich – a protégé of Vladimir Shchuko, Iofan's nemesis on the Palace of the Soviets – in collaboration with Iofan's former assistant Belopolsky and Nikolai Nikitin, the engineer who had made the structural calculations for the Palace of the Soviets and Moscow State University. Iofan's only consolation for seeing his former collaborators supplant him was that, although it was gigantic at over 270 feet high, their monument was still 60 feet shorter than the planned statue of Lenin on top of the Palace of the Soviets.

Once the Germans had been pushed back from the approaches to Moscow, Iofan was flown to inspect Istra, a small city to the west of the capital known for a historic 18th-century monastery complex that had been largely destroyed during the occupation. The government's policy was to find a new basis for the refoundation of cities that had been razed to the ground. In the case of Istra, the strategy was to redevelop it as a city of sanatoriums and nursing homes, caring for the health of the people of Moscow. The following year, in 1944, Iofan was put in charge of a special planning commission to devise a strategy for rebuilding the Black Sea port city of Novorossiisk.

With the experience of having surveyed three shattered cities of very different scales, ranging from Stalingrad's pre-war population of 450,000 to Istra with less than 50,000 residents, Iofan developed an overarching strategy for urbanism. It is a measure of the political importance of Soviet reconstruction that, early in 1944, he was called on to describe his plans for the millions who read *Izvestiya*. He was later filmed for a Moscow newsreel at work on the rebuilding of the Soviet Union.

Iofan was essentially approaching city planning from the picturesque viewpoint of the influential 19th-century Austrian architect Camillo Sitte: he understood a city as a balance of background organic

urban fabric and monumental landmarks. Big cities needed multiple monuments, forming networks, while smaller ones required fewer civic buildings. Iofan drew up a systematic formula categorizing cities according to their size, based not on functional zoning or density but on visual impact. Large cities, with a population of 500,000 or more, should contain a number of what Iofan called “‘pivotal’ ensembles of buildings of architectural importance’.”¹² These should not attempt to overshadow the central part of the city, which in Iofan’s view needed monumental architecture and formal public spaces, but they should have sufficient presence to enliven residential suburbs. Medium-sized cities, with populations of 200,000–300,000, would have a smaller quantity of these pivotal ensembles; small cities of up to 100,000 people would restrict monumental architecture to the centre, but there would still be a need for careful spatial organization elsewhere.

Iofan wrote:

It is necessary to find again the image of every city which is to be rebuilt, and to preserve its original architectural face. In this work both the rich experience of the great epochs of the past and the experience of modern architecture must be applied. Deep importance must be attached to the ‘architectural’ connection of the city with the surrounding land. The natural topography must be used in the composition of the whole city. Cities must be modelled much as ‘our old Russian cities were created’.

The situation of the city along a river or on a seashore must determine its planning.¹³

Over the years, Iofan had shown himself just as ready to work on what might be called ‘background buildings’ as on the monumental foreground. As a prescription for shaping a city, his strategy in 1944 was not so far removed from his pre-war thinking about the role of the Palace of the Soviets in the overall scheme of the rebuilding of Moscow. In 1936, he had observed that: ‘For us, individual tall buildings can have tremendous value from the standpoint of creating a silhouette of the city and providing architectural accents.’¹⁴

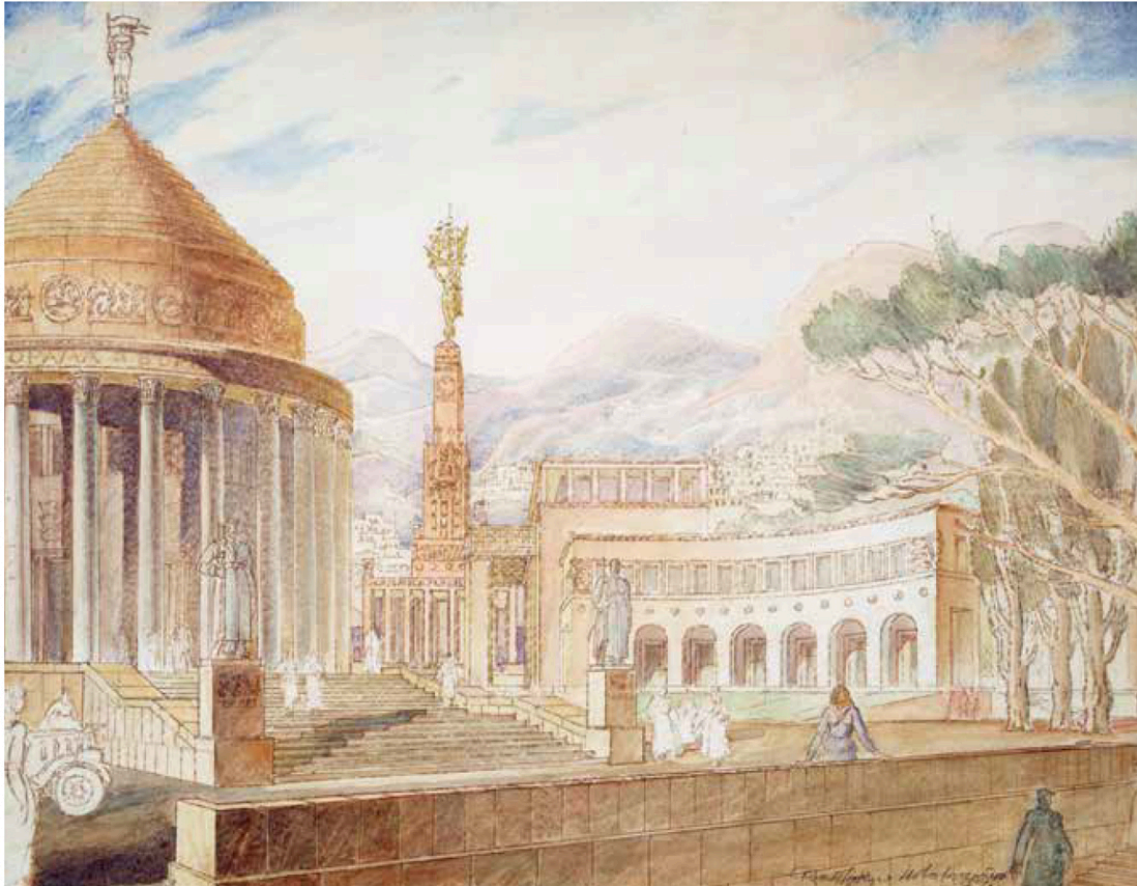
Volgograd – as the former Stalingrad is now called – and Novorossiisk are two entirely different cities: one is an inland industrial complex spreading for miles, the other a compact port with a southern climate. But they both have a hard edge: in the case of Volgograd, the enormous Volga river at its widest. The road bridge that spans it today is 1.5 miles long. Novorossiisk is defined by the shoreline of the Black Sea. Perhaps influenced by his memories of the Odessa he had left thirty-three years earlier, Iofan worked to reorientate both cities towards the water. In Stalingrad he envisaged a formal, mile-long landscaped embankment, criss-crossed by cascades of stepped pathways along its length to connect a crescent-shaped public space at the top with the river below.

For Novorossiisk he prepared a much more picturesque proposal that he developed as an official masterplan. He took the pragmatic decision to retain the existing street grid and modify it, rather than start from scratch: ‘Novorossiisk has been razed almost to the ground, but the best things about it, the streets and the landscape, have been preserved. If you wanted to completely change the grid and rearrange the street pattern, you would be better off building a city somewhere else.’¹⁵

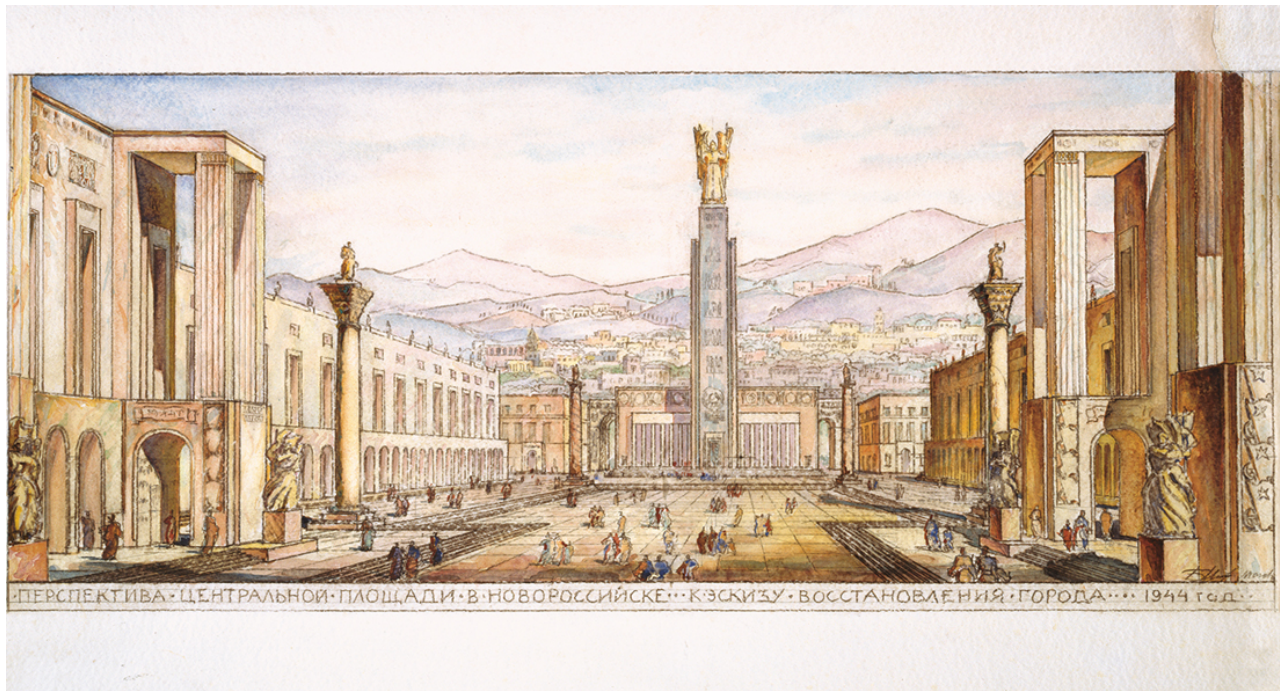
He designated an area to the north for industrial use and positioned residential buildings in the south of the city. He planned the planting of belts of cypress trees to serve as windbreaks and the digging of a network of canals to collect storm water run-offs. Two of the former main streets were closed to traffic and turned into a linear park, connecting a newly created city square with the shoreline. Most buildings were limited to three storeys in height, stepping up to four in the civic centre. The heart of the city would be a new square with the city hall on one side.

Iofan designed a four-storey building with an attached tower and viewing stand, in a distant echo of Red Square in Moscow, to form a strong vertical element that would be clearly visible as the symbolic entrance to Novorossiisk. The square would be completed by a technical college and a hotel. At the other end of the centre, he planned a second square on the edge of the harbour. This would form the setting for the main post office, telegraph building and customs house. Iofan’s charming watercolour

images show an Italianate plaza marked by a pair of giant columns supporting bronze sculptures, in the manner of St Mark's in Venice. The project was clearly one in which Iofan was personally invested. In an interview for *Literatura i iskusstvo* (*Literature and Art*) – which described Iofan in his studio in the House on the Embankment: 'Under the mansard roof, overlooking the Kremlin, the architect works morning and night,' – Iofan told the magazine that he had first seen Novorossiisk as a young student in 1910.¹⁶ Alongside his self-consciously archaic rendering of the reconstructed city, seen from the sea with a couple of schooners tied up in the harbour, the magazine reproduced his drawing of Novorossiisk in ruins, sketched on site.



Novorossiisk, a Black Sea port, was badly damaged in fighting with the Germans during the Second World War. Iofan, who had known the city in peacetime, was commissioned to produce a detailed strategy to rebuild it. His project initially was a key element in Soviet propaganda, until Iofan himself came under fire in Stalin's campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.



At the centre of Iofan's plan for Novorossiysk was a civic square around which he grouped the city's key buildings. He maintained the underlying street grid, but adapted it to refocus on the seafront, from which its residential areas had previously been isolated. Iofan's memories of Italy and Venice in particular are clear in this illustration from 1944.

When Iofan went back on the first anniversary of the city's liberation after 235 days of German occupation and continuous warfare, he wrote for *Izvestiya*: 'In its rebuilding, the defects of its former planning must be avoided. The old Novorossiysk was cut off from the Black Sea by streets with ugly warehouses. Due to this, the sea seems to have been left out. The future city is planned for a population of 150,000. It will embrace the sea with all its splendour of colour and perspective. The whole city will turn its face to the sea.'¹⁷

At first, Iofan's project was warmly received in Novorossiysk, and his plan was hailed as evidence of the rapid pace of reconstruction in the Soviet Union. It was only later, when he appeared to fall from favour with Stalin, that this changed. The scheme was attacked in language that, although it used architectural terms, was intended to convey a political message about Iofan's alleged 'cosmopolitanism'. Nevertheless, its two most fundamental elements – to reorientate Novorossiysk to face towards the sea, and to create a park highway – shaped the city's future development, even if there is little to see of Iofan's architecture.

In the closing years of the war Iofan took on a new official role that demonstrated how close he had become to the heart of the Soviet state. He and Aleksei Shchusev were appointed as architectural experts to advise the so-called 'trophy commission', known officially as the Committee of Arts of the Council of People's Commissars. They drew up a list of precious artefacts in the possession of Germany and its allies, to be located and brought to the Soviet Union by special detachments of Soviet troops accompanied by uniformed art historians. This list included such extraordinary works of art as the Pergamon Altar, a 120-foot marble structure carved around 150 BC in the Hellenic city of Pergamon (present-day Izmir in Turkey).

The original idea for the trophy commission had come from the scholar and curator Igor Grabar, who wrote to Stalin in January 1943 suggesting that the losses to Soviet cultural heritage caused by German invasion, subsequent looting and war damage should be made good by reparations. His plan was that every Soviet loss would be compensated by the seizure of an equivalent work from a museum belonging to their defeated enemies. Stalin not only accepted this proposal, but massively increased its scope and scale.

Grabar set up a committee known as the Bureau of Experts of the Extraordinary Commission for the Investigation of the Atrocities of the Fascists. It met for the first time in Moscow on 22 October 1943, six weeks after Italy had deposed Mussolini and signed an armistice, to draw up a list of key pieces for seizure. According to one source, Grabar had to disappoint Iofan, who was still keen to raid Italian as well as German museums: 'Forget Italy,' Grabar told him. 'Unfortunately, Italy is now our ally.'¹⁸

Between 1944 and 1945, the committee worked 'for the salvation, collection and export of the most valuable works of art from Germany'.¹⁹ The exact number of artworks appropriated in this way is unknown, but recent research suggests that more than a million pieces, ranging from works on paper and oil on canvas to sculpture, books, jewellery and archaeological treasures, were seized from Germany, Austria, Poland and Romania. They were packed up and shipped to Moscow, after which point many were never seen again. Among other items, 813 paintings and 107 sculptures from Berlin – including works by Vermeer, Giorgione's *Venus* and Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* – were taken to Leningrad and stored at the Hermitage.

The lists compiled by Iofan and other experts were only one aspect of the seizures. The museum storehouses of bombed-out German cities were simply looted wholesale. It is easy to see why Iofan would have been so interested in the Pergamon altar, for which Germany had built a dedicated museum in 1930; its high-relief sculptural friezes depicting the Olympian gods at war were some of the finest examples of the integration of architecture and sculpture to survive from the ancient world. It had inspired the Victor Emmanuel monument in Rome, which Iofan had carefully studied so many years earlier, and its formal language can be seen in his designs for the lower levels of the Palace of the Soviets.

But Iofan was interested in more than individual masterpieces: he wanted to develop a wide-ranging strategy for cultural renewal in the USSR. 'In the German museums there are excellent examples of Greek architecture,' he pointed out.²⁰ He proposed the creation of a workshop in Moscow 'for the high-quality reproduction of works of art by means of plaster casts and their distribution in the provincial museums of the Soviet Union'.²¹ He also saw an opportunity to add an important extra element to the programme for the Palace of the Soviets, one that he hoped would win Stalin's support. What really commanded his attention was the chance of using the Red Army's trophy brigades to assemble a collection of artworks so magnificent that it would allow him to create what could be the world's supreme museum of art in Moscow, inside the palace.

As Sergei Merkurov put it:

The museums of the Axis powers are full of wonderful masterpieces that could be due to the Soviet Union as reparations. We should be entitled to be consider all the most valuable works of art belonging to the enemy as eligible for reparations.

Adding them to our collections with masterworks of excellent quality could lift the museum to the highest rank of all western European and American art institutions. It would be possible to build a magnificent museum of fine art in our Moscow. All the most valuable works of art of the enemy should be pulled together in one place in Moscow, which is the centre of political and cultural life in our state. It could be an ideal monument to immortalize the glory of the Russian army.²²

Iofan and others in Moscow saw the chance to create a new museum in the Soviet Union that would equal the Louvre, the British Museum or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It would have been a return to the idea of a museum based on the spoils of the victors, taken in conflict. Iofan may have known of Hitler's very similar plans, drawn up with the architect Hermann Giesler, to build a museum in Linz to house art that the Germans had looted from all over Europe. These plans, on which Giesler was still working as late as February 1945, included not just an art museum but a 35,000-seat concert hall, a 500-foot-high bell tower with Hitler's parents entombed at its base and a carillon playing Bruckner at suitable intervals, and Hitler's own mausoleum, to be based on the Pantheon.

Full details of the works taken by the committee have never been made public. Even while the war was still under way, Moscow was embarrassed by Western pressure against what looked like wholesale looting. In the 1950s, its Warsaw Pact allies in East Germany and Hungary demanded the return of their property. When the files opened briefly in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was clear that much of the art the Soviets took had not in fact belonged to the Axis governments at all, but had been stolen by the Nazis from private owners.

In the end, Iofan's dream of a great new museum never materialized. The established museums in the USSR, especially the Pushkin in Moscow and the Hermitage in Leningrad, had no interest in seeing so many treasures used to enable the establishment of a massive rival. More than a million items that had been shipped by train, plane and truck to the Soviet Union sat in museum storerooms across the USSR for decades. A substantial number were returned, especially those that had come from what became East Germany; the Pergamon altar went back to Berlin in 1958 and has since attracted the attention of authorities in Turkey, from where it was originally taken during the 19th century. But the majority are still in Russia, and many have not been seen since their seizure.

As Iofan returned to Moscow towards the end of the war, however, he was still full of hope for the museum project. He had emerged from the conflict in good standing with Stalin; he had played his part in the victory and, in the process, enhanced his own reputation. Last but not least, he had identified a new way in which the long-delayed Palace of the Soviets – a project that remained hugely important to him – might become a triumphant monument to Soviet power.

Post-War

In 1941, Boris Iofan became one of the first architects to win the Stalin Prize. He received his medal (second class) at a ceremony in Moscow's Gorky Art Theatre where his colleague Aleksei Shchusev, the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and the composer Dmitry Shostakovich were also honoured.



The peak of Iofan's success came in 1941. The Palace of the Soviets was taking shape, he had built the Soviet pavilions at the Paris Exposition and New York World's Fair, and had won one of the first Stalin Prizes. He was presented with this lacquer box, the work of former icon-painters using their skills for the regime.

Iofan's prize was awarded for his Soviet pavilion at the Paris Exposition. Detractors argued that the success of the project owed more to Vera Mukhina's sculpture than to his architecture, but Iofan had two dedicated supporters as jury members, both of whom had worked with him on the pavilion. One was Mukhina herself, who vigorously and publicly asserted that Iofan should take the credit. The other was Sergei Merkurov, the sculptor responsible for the project's statue of Stalin in the guise of a Roman emperor as well as the Lenin monument on the Palace of the Soviets.

The ceremony was broadcast live on Radio Moscow and conferred lasting prestige on the first group of prize-winners. They had the endorsement of a jury of their peers, the personal involvement of Stalin himself and a financial reward at least as generous as that of the Nobel Prize. In Iofan's case, it was a cheque for 50,000 roubles. Later, however, the Stalin Prize was devalued by what came to be regarded as a self-serving, culturally conservative clique of jurors, looking after their own and shutting out the

younger generation. Of the forty members of the original jury, thirty-two eventually received Stalin Prizes themselves. Some have suggested that it became as much a stigma as an honour – a means of enforcing conformity rather than a genuine celebration of excellence. But for Iofan, it was an important validation. He was not yet fifty, an age by which some of the world's greatest architects have yet to establish themselves; neither Louis Kahn nor Frank Gehry, for example, had built anything that they wanted to be remembered for before their fiftieth birthdays. Iofan, by contrast, was already at the chronological midpoint of his career, apparently with everything in place to consolidate his early success.

He had four major buildings to his credit. He had built the regime's most prominent landmark in Moscow; a clinic that every member of the party leadership experienced at one time or another; and two pavilions seen by millions of visitors at World's Fairs in Paris and New York. Zholtovsky and Shchusev, once described by Nikita Khrushchev as 'the whales of Soviet architecture',¹ had built more – but Iofan had done enough to become a highly visible figure for the Soviet elite, and so a natural choice for the major new government commissions that followed after the end of the war. He was a party member and sat on important committees including Moscow's planning council, but wisely showed no sign of personal political ambition. He was continually invited to take part in special projects and to speak at conferences.

He had survived the danger and the trauma of the purges, deftly switching allegiance from Aleksei Rykov to Joseph Stalin. He had coped with the vicious infighting of professional architectural politics in Moscow by keeping out of it as much as he could. And as long as the Palace of the Soviets was still – officially, at least – a live project, he did not yet have to carry the burden of a significant failure.



With the Palace of the Soviets stalled, Moscow University's new building offered Iofan another chance to build architecture on a monumental scale.

As the war came to an end, Iofan's future seemed extremely promising: his studio at the Directorate for the Construction of the Palace of the Soviets was busy with commissions for masterplans, an invitation to compete for the design of Moscow's planned victory monument in Red Square, and new

projects for high-rise towers. But within four years, he would be reduced to pleading unsuccessfully with Stalin for the chance to build almost anything. He owed his sudden, painful downfall partly to professional jealousy and partly to Stalin's paranoia – Iofan was a victim of the dictator's campaign against so-called 'rootless cosmopolitans', although, unlike many, he again survived without being jailed or worse. There are also signs that Iofan lost the confidence of some members of the Soviet leadership in his ability to deliver a huge, complex project.

On the surface, everything looked positive for Iofan in 1945. Even before Germany had signed the act of surrender, Radio Moscow announced that construction was restarting on the Palace of the Soviets. In a broadcast reported by the *New York Times*, a Kremlin spokesman declared: 'A massive statue of Lenin will sit on seven cylinders, each of which will be decorated with allegorical sculptures of the Soviet epoch' – although this description no longer reflected Iofan's design. Radio Moscow continued: 'The latest achievements of science and technology will be employed in its construction. The most prominent Soviet architects, engineers, artists and sculptors will participate in drawing up the final design for the palace.'² Given that there had already been at least three earlier 'final' designs, the project was not in fact as irreversible as this confident tone suggested. But the Soviet approach, as ever, was to make large claims as if they were fact and then, when they failed to materialize, refuse to acknowledge them as failures. The palace would, said Radio Moscow, be the 'tallest edifice in the world': Soviet boasts that it would be 100 feet taller than the Empire State Building in New York suggested the start of a new conflict after the end of the Great Patriotic War. For the time being, at least, it was still a symbolic one.

Iofan pushed hard to publicize the new scheme for the palace and to find new reasons for its continuing relevance. What he had previously presented as the fulfilment of Kirov's vision for marking the foundation of the Soviet Union turned into a victory monument celebrating the achievements of the nation's armed forces. At the end of 1945, his latest version went on triumphant display at the Kremlin in the magnificent setting of St George's Hall. A 13-foot, 1:100 scale plaster model and a huge perspective 18 feet across were unveiled with considerable ceremony alongside Merkulov and Andreyev's studies for the sculpture and frescoes planned for the palace interior. In public, the party hierarchy was complimentary, but it was immediately made clear to Iofan that he would need to make significant changes. He was instructed to scale the whole project down, to maintain the general arrangement of the design but shrink its height by 325 feet.

Iofan assembled a new team at the Directorate to review the work that had been done in Sverdlovsk, modifying and simplifying the tower. Andrei Prokofiev, the current head of construction for the project, was brought back from his duties running aluminium factories in the Urals. But while the design teams could refine decorative schemes, source exotic materials, perfect lighting techniques and develop innovative air-conditioning technology – and even produce prototypes for the specially made bronze door handles – there was a complete absence of serious construction work on the site. The pumps required to keep the massive, 100-foot-deep foundation pit dry had been out of action for nearly four years and, as a consequence, it was waterlogged. Iofan's engineers explored the site with a view to bringing it back to life. During 1946 he drew up at least three different versions of the tower in an attempt to streamline the construction, reduce its size and bring costs under control. In the course of that year the height was reduced from 1,365 to 800 feet.

The technical problems on site were daunting. Iofan and his specialist consultants tried everything to stop water from seeping into the foundations. Nothing was officially said in public, but the difficulties gave rise to all kinds of rumours. The devout regarded the setbacks as evidence of divine retribution for the sacrilegious destruction of the cathedral. Lazar Kaganovich began to tell people that he had suggested back in 1931 that the palace ought to be built on the Lenin Hills. He also pointed out that, as he was the most prominent member of Stalin's leadership with a Jewish background, there had always been the risk of an anti-Semitic aspect being added to the argument against demolishing the cathedral if he was associated with the proposal. Meanwhile, in the background, Moscow's elite began to regard the project as doomed.

No doubt the technical issues with the palace could eventually have been resolved, given enough money and sufficient foreign expertise and equipment. But Stalin was not prepared to wait. According to his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, he demanded a rapid transformation of the Soviet capital so as to make it clear to both his rivals and his allies that the country had emerged from the war stronger than before. He believed it was imperative that Moscow take on the appearance of a dynamic and impressive modern city so that he could intimidate the West, impress fraternal socialist states and subdue restive constituent parts of the Soviet empire. It did not seem likely that the Palace of the Soviets could be built quickly enough to do that job.

Stalin decided to mark the 800th anniversary of Moscow's foundation in 1947 with a ceremony launching plans to build a ring of skyscrapers around the city. Even if the palace wasn't going to feature in the first crop of towers, it was a promise that there would soon be other new buildings to impress visitors. Iofan, along with Moscow's chief architect, Dmitry Chechulin, was on the commission set up to oversee the celebrations. Its political members included Lavrenty Beria, Stalin's loathsome secret policeman who led the NKVD, and Georgy Malenkov, who looked like becoming the next head of the Council of Ministers.

Beria had a deeply unsavoury reputation; after his arrest in 1953 he would be indicted as a sadistic rapist and murderer, rumoured to have buried his victims in the grounds of his Moscow villa. During the 1940s, however, he was as interested in architectural issues as Kaganovich and Stalin, and played a key role in the building of Moscow's first seven skyscrapers. He had studied construction engineering at the Polytechnic in Baku, although he did not, as some of his supporters claimed, have an architecture degree. If Beria really had wanted to have Iofan shot during the purges, as was rumoured, meetings of the anniversary commission would have had an uneasy undercurrent. It was this group that worked with Stalin to decide where to site the high-rises, how they would look and who would design them.

The first public event to celebrate the new Moscow took place on 7 September 1947 marking the start of work on a monument to the city's founder, Yuri Dolgoruky. An hour later, eight simultaneous ceremonies were held at different sites across the city. In the presence of a senior member of the Politburo, a bronze plaque was unveiled at each location, designating it as the spot for a new tower. In the event only seven of these high-rise structures were built, and not all of them corresponded with the original plan.

Stalin claimed in his own speech:

One of the grave cankers of the big capitals of the European, Asian and American countries is the presence of slums where millions of impoverished working people are doomed to dull existence and slow, painful death. The merit of Moscow consists in the fact that it entirely eliminated these slums and provided working people with the possibility of moving from cellars and huts to the flats and houses of the bourgeoisie, into new comfortable houses constructed by Soviet power.³

There was little truth in this claim. The skyscrapers were too expensive for even the Soviet elite to be able to afford to pay a rent that reflected the true cost of construction, and the buildings would do nothing to ease the city's housing shortage. The architect Arkady Mordvinov better understood the real meaning of the event. It was intended to celebrate Stalin as much as Moscow: 'The figures of the seven monumental giants, illuminated by rays of sunlight during the day and by a myriad of lights at night, loom over the capital like pillars of glory, speaking the language of architecture, of the inexhaustible spiritual strength of our labouring people, and of the bright genius of the wise architect of communism, Stalin the Great.'⁴

Chechulin awarded himself the commission to build two of the towers while Iofan designed the first, a thirty-two-storey structure mixing offices and a hotel on a site on the Lenin Hills that Muscovites referred to as Sparrow Hills. Even though it was never built, it was the aesthetic model for all that followed. *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* (*Soviet Art*), the Union of Soviet Architects publication, reported that 'Workers of the Leninsky District gathered for a meeting dedicated to the laying of foundations of the

tallest thirty-two-storey building. This house, which will have 750 residential apartments and 520 work rooms, is being built on the Lenin Hills, on the banks of the Moskva River....A full member of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR, B. M. Iofan, spoke at the meeting...'⁵

In a capitalist economy, the logic underpinning high-rise construction is based on land values. The more that the planning system permits to be built on a square foot of land, the more valuable that land and its surroundings become, the greater the pressure to pile up as much income-generating space as possible, and the more money there is available to invest in the extra costs involved with building high. Thus in New York or London there is a historical tendency for high-rises to cluster together and in so doing, increase land values even more. This in turn encourages building still higher to put more valuable footage on the same plot. In such a system, the precise number of floors – and the efficiency of the ratio of usable footage to the space lost in lift cores and services – is critical. It shapes the mix of accommodation, too. Cafés, small shops and everyday service providers cannot pay the same rents as super-prime office users, resulting in office monocultures.

When the state owns all the land, as it did in Moscow, the same mechanisms do not apply. There is a direct relationship between building costs and the amount of accommodation provided, and a greater range of uses becomes feasible. If land is not in short supply, low-rise construction is cheaper to build and skyscrapers become primarily ornamental or symbolic structures. This was the basis of Khrushchev's doubts about the wisdom of Moscow University's high-rise building plans. His argument (made only after Stalin's death) was that the same amount of square footage could have been built more economically with a campus of low-rise structures than in a high-rise slab topped by a fretwork skyline of towers and spires.

Khrushchev viewed Stalin's decision to build high as simple vanity, depriving the state of the resources it needed to address the Soviet Union's desperate housing shortage. Stalin went on to export the Moscow skyscraper style to his eastern European vassal states, making clear its symbolic significance. Warsaw's Palace of Culture, designed by Lev Rudnev, opened in 1955 and was widely interpreted as a mark of Poland's colonial subjugation to Moscow. Anatoly Strizhevsky's Soviet embassy in Berlin was another example. The style reached Romania, Bulgaria and even Mao's China, where Sergei Andreyev built Shanghai's Exhibition Centre.

Iofan had been thinking about how to build a new skyline for Moscow ever since his first revelatory visit to New York in 1934. He wanted to integrate the Palace of Soviets into the city by making it the tallest of a number of towers positioned in such a way as to create a coherent silhouette for Moscow; different from Manhattan's, but equally recognizable. Long before the Council of Ministers discussed the matter, Iofan had argued that the Soviet Union should avoid following the anarchic example of the United States and offer another model for the future of the city. He was determined that the Palace of Soviets would not only eclipse the Empire State Building as the world's tallest, but would be better integrated with the city around it, building on the example of Rockefeller Center. Iofan was thinking about how the palace would relate both to its immediate surroundings and to Moscow as a whole. He worked to refine the lower levels of the palace and the spaces around it, taking Bernini's St Peter's Square at the Vatican as his model for an appropriate setting. 'I believe that part of the Palace of Soviets should be designed so as to make a transition to buildings of normal height,' he wrote. 'To give the Palace of Soviets some kind of a context we need to place several buildings of great height at an appropriate distance from it.'⁶

Iofan had studied the visual impact of the Empire State Building on the New York skyline and concluded that, impressive though it was in sheer height, it failed to play its proper part in terms of urban design because it was never considered as part of an overall concept. 'It can be seen just as much from close up as from long distances. Given the great height of the building, the sense of scale is lost. It makes a skyscraper seem like just another building. For this reason, we must pay attention to the Moscow skyline and find a way of distributing high-rise buildings amidst what surrounds them, and consider how they will relate to other buildings, etc.'⁷

Iofan had also anticipated Stalin's demands for skyscrapers that looked specifically Russian. At the eighth session of the Academy of Architecture in 1947, he argued:

The difference between Soviet high-rise buildings and foreign structures lies at the very heart of our way of life. Here, we consider the composition of the silhouette of the city as an integrated whole. We planned the location of high-rise buildings in Moscow to create that unified silhouette. In the United States, which has been building skyscrapers for more than fifty years, the negative results have made it fashionable now to think about low-rise construction. Randomly placed skyscrapers create oppressive and sunless canyon-like streets. Moscow's multi-storey buildings will be free of this quality. They will be located in relatively open spaces, placed at a considerable distance from each other. They will not deprive their surroundings of essential air and sunlight at street level. They will not oppress the individual on the pavement.⁸

Iofan was dismissive of American architects in the early days of the skyscraper, who, in his view, began by stacking Italian Renaissance palazzos on top of each other, then moved to multi-storey gothic department stores 'and without sarcasm, called them cathedrals of commerce'.⁹ It would be different in Moscow. 'Soviet architects will not follow this path, they have something to guide them...the Palace of the Soviets.'¹⁰ His ideas were reflected in a resolution adopted by the Council of Ministers to transform Moscow by building skyscrapers. It asserted:

Architects and builders are faced with a great challenge, namely, to create a series of high-rise buildings which should be, in terms of size, technology and architecture, a new form of construction seen for the first time in our country. The proportions and skylines of these buildings must be original in composition, both architecturally and artistically. They should be linked to the historical development of Moscow and to the silhouette of the future Palace of Soviets. These new buildings should not, therefore, be copies of the multi-storeyed structures already familiar abroad.¹¹

The metro stations in Moscow had shown considerable architectural diversity, from the bold geometry of Nikolai Ladovsky's Krasniye Vorota to Ivan Zholtovsky's Palladian Kurskaya. But the towers were designed to form a single group of structures that were almost interchangeable, to create a unified identity for the Soviet capital as a whole. At the centre was the palace, with the seven smaller towers paying homage to it. Each smaller tower formed the centre of its own district and all of them took the architecture of the Palace of Soviets as their model. This idea of a network of distributed centres was the same urban strategy that Iofan had proposed two years earlier, when he discussed the post-war restoration of Soviet cities in *Izvestiya*. He had described the need for every city to have a monumental centre with a number of urban 'pivots' distributed around it. Their exact number would depend on the overall size of the city. In Moscow's case, the Palace of the Soviets was the monumental centre and each of the seven towers would be a pivot.

Despite Iofan's efforts to distance his work from what he had seen on his 1934 trip to America, that first thirty-two-storey tower had a silhouette clearly modelled on New York precedents – albeit with typically socialist decorative detail. It set the tone for the work of each of the architects who designed the seven towers, ranging from the Ukraina Hotel to the Foreign Ministry.

Even when they were brand new, the towers resembled a strangely out-of-time period piece. As Iofan knew, the idea of transforming Moscow's skyline with a cluster of towers had been discussed more than twenty years earlier; El Lissitzky had proposed the construction of a ring of new high-rise buildings around Moscow as early as 1924. He designed a scheme for eight so-called horizontal skyscrapers, each taking the form of flat platforms three or four floors deep, cantilevered 160 feet into the air on top of a single lift core that was directly connected to an underground mass transit system which did not yet exist. They were to be aligned towards the Kremlin. There was an element of

deliberate ambiguity in their Russian name (which roughly translates as ‘cloud irons’ or ‘cloud props’), intended to offset any suggestion that they had been inspired by American skyscrapers. El Lissitzky’s idea provided an impressively original new model for what high-rise buildings could be. Coincidentally or not, Stalin’s post-war plan for Moscow also originally involved building eight new towers. Compared with Manhattan’s glass curtain wall structures, represented by the Lever and Seagram Towers (built at the same time), and unlike El Lissitzky’s work, they seemed like fossilized throwbacks, like the ancient American cars of the 1950s with chromed fins still cruising the streets of Havana alongside present-day Toyotas. They were all the more retrograde when measured against the experimental high-rise designs of the 1920s produced by such Soviet architects as Ivan Leonidov and Nikolai Ladovsky, which foreshadowed projects realized in the late 20th century.

Planning under an authoritarian dictatorship with a ruling cult of personality is a fluid process. The plan for Iofan’s first tower on the Lenin Hills was scrapped almost immediately after the ceremony; instead, Stalin decided to allocate the site to an expansion of Moscow University’s science faculties. Iofan was appointed to design it in March 1948. It was planned as a monumental high-rise structure, a city in a single building, much in the manner of the House on the Embankment and the Palace of the Soviets. Iofan mapped out a scheme including what would have been the tallest tower in Europe at the time (more than 800 feet) as its centrepiece, topped by a stainless steel sculpture in an arrangement that echoed some of his other projects: one version of the design even included Lenin. He placed the university’s ceremonial spaces in the high-rise and allocated lower individual buildings, grouped around it, to each faculty. A photograph in the university newspaper shows him standing on a frostbound site in his sheepskin-lined coat and homburg, with the rector uncomfortably posed holding his sketches in mittened fingers. ‘Let’s create a building worthy of the Stalin era,’ Iofan told the reporter.¹²

But five months after his appointment, just as he had completed a set of working drawings, Iofan was fired and Lev Rudnev was brought in from Leningrad to take his place. Some Russian writers suggest that Iofan lost the project over a matter of principle: the story goes that because he was determined to place the university close enough to the Moscow riverbank for its central tower to be clearly visible from the city centre and reflected in its waters, he refused an instruction to move it back. ‘Gentle in dealing with people, able to compromise in personal relationships, very respectful of the opinions of the leadership, he became unyielding when it came to the artistic qualities of a piece of architecture,’ writes Aleksandr Vaskin. ‘Prior to this, Iofan had successfully resisted an attempt to persuade him to increase the height of the Soviet pavilion in Paris to confront its German rival – but things did not go so well this time.’¹³ He was ordered to move the university away from the river, supposedly to a less geologically unstable part of the site, and was dismissed when he refused. It is an implausible story that suggests a semi-public attempt by Iofan, who had already written to Stalin privately begging to be reinstated, to salvage some dignity.

Others have suggested that the real reason the site was shifted was the presence of a secret government communications bunker beneath it; or that underground nuclear research laboratories below the university made the site particularly sensitive. However, none of these explanations take into account what else was happening in Moscow at the time. There are two likely connected reasons for Iofan’s removal from the university project. The first became clear early in 1949, when Iofan and a number of other leading architects were attacked by *Pravda* for ‘slavishly grovelling to the USA’, the start of Stalin’s campaign against cosmopolitanism. Iofan’s Jewish background was counting against him. The other is that Stalin and Beria decided that Iofan and his team were incapable of delivering the massive university project on the timescale that they demanded. After Iofan’s dismissal, it was reported that only 35 per cent of the tasks allocated to his studio in the first nine months of 1948 had been carried out.

Stalin gave Beria responsibility for building the towers. Beria brought in Rudnev and Aleksei Komarovskiy, an engineer with the rank of major general in the construction brigade of the NKVD’s armed forces, who had a fearsome reputation. Komarovskiy had four years to build the enormous university complex. He gave Rudnev no time to make any significant changes to Iofan’s design, apart

from moving it away from the riverbank and adding a spire to replace Iofan's plans to crown the building with sculpture.



Iofan's cross-section through the Moscow University buildings showed a tower, flanked by lower wings. The design was almost complete when he was dismissed. Rudnev took it on and swapped a spire for the sculpture on the tower.

A comparison is often made between Stalin's working relationship with Iofan in Moscow and that of Hitler and Speer in Berlin. Even though Komarovskiy was not himself a designer, he is in many ways a better match for Speer than Iofan. They were both ruthlessly efficient organizers, ready to mobilize tens of thousands of forced labourers and work them to death. Speer built underground factories to make ballistic missiles for Hitler, expanded Auschwitz and deported Berlin's Jewish citizens to make way for a massive restructuring of the German capital. Komarovskiy presided over the building of the Moscow–Volga canal, a project which caused countless deaths from hunger, disease and neglect. Overseen by Beria, he used gulag labour to build the Soviet atomic plant that gave the USSR nuclear weapons. He created a network of prison camps around Moscow to accommodate the German POWs and political prisoners who were forced to work on building the university until as late as 1952.

Even before he lost the Moscow University project, Iofan's star was fading. His professional rivals turned on him first. For all the publicity given to his urban reconstruction projects and the theoretical underpinning he had developed for them, he had little to show for it. His unsuccessful submission to the competition for the centre of Stalingrad was heavily criticized by his old adversary Karo Alabyan, who had become chairman of the architectural academy after the war. Ten years after Alabyan had accused Iofan of consorting with Trotskyites and Nazis, he called his proposal for Stalingrad an expression of 'gigantomania', 'far-fetched', 'inflated' and 'overblown', while paying perfunctory compliments to Iofan's pavilions in Paris and New York.¹⁴ This attack was made in front of the Moscow architects' cell of the Communist Party, a forum in which architectural criticism was more than an academic exercise – it came with potentially life-threatening consequences.

Alabyan singled out Iofan's proposal for a monument in Stalingrad for particular scorn: 'There is a colossal granite staircase to the Volga, descending to a monument dedicated to Comrade Stalin. Looking at this staircase, one asks oneself exactly who will use it. This is such a melodramatic and manipulative technique that it has no place in an authentic monument.'¹⁵ His party ally Nikolai Bylinkin was equally

damning of Iofan's ideas for rebuilding Novorossiisk: Iofan had designed a picturesque, monumental centre catering for tourists, not residents, and it was far too large for a city of only 140,000 people. 'The architecture of the harbour looks as if it has been designed in the hope of attracting well-dressed visitors to moor their yachts here,' Bylinkin observed. 'But the reality is that this is an industrial city, not a resort. It's a commercial port, full of oil barges and tugs.'¹⁶



Just before Iofan was sacked from the Moscow University project, his ceremonial presentation of his design to the rector Aleksandr Nesmeyanov, on the left, and Sergei Kaftanov, the education minister, right, was photographed for the official record.

Tellingly, Iofan was also attacked for his reluctance to accept criticism from his professional peers. During the war he had been commissioned to remodel and extend Moscow's Vakhtangov Theatre, which had been damaged in a German air raid, but Iofan had resigned from the project and handed it on to another studio. Insinuations about this situation from Zinovy Rosenfeld, another member of the architects' cell of the Communist Party, suggest that Iofan had an unusually thin skin for an architect:

Iofan was entrusted with the design of the Vakhtangov Theatre. He brought his project to the Architectural Council for review, and there they suggested that the project was not good enough. It would seem that such a great master as Iofan would be obliged to take into account their comments, but he preferred to abandon the project and transfer it to another. Our great masters of architecture have forgotten that it is their creative duty to contribute to the construction of Moscow.¹⁷

By the spring of 1948, Iofan was also falling out of favour with the party. He was reprimanded for what was described by the Central Committee as the irresponsible attitude of the Construction Directorate of the Palace of the Soviets to its work on the reconstruction of one of Moscow's modern landmarks. The building in question was the art nouveau Yar pleasure palace on Leningradsky Prospekt: Iofan was stripped of a commission to turn it into a hotel, and the job went to another architect. Grigoriy Simonov, chairman of the architecture committee of the Ministry for Construction and Urban Planning, singled out Iofan for criticism. In an article titled 'Overcoming Serious Failures in Architecture' published in *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* in March 1948, Simonov wrote: 'In his recent work, the great master

of our architecture Comrade Iofan is not free from pseudo-innovation and the influences of decadent modern Western architecture.¹⁸ Three months later, Iofan and his engineer colleague Andrei Prokofiev, head of construction at the Palace of the Soviets studio, were dismissed from the Moscow University project.

The attack on the architects was one of the opening moves in Stalin's increasingly virulent campaign against 'rootless cosmopolitans' – a campaign aimed mainly, if not exclusively, at the Soviet Union's Jewish citizens. In the course of the year 1949 hundreds of writers, critics, playwrights, philosophers, artists and architects were dismissed from their jobs and in some cases arrested and shot. The language was always the same. 'Bourgeois aesthetics and formalism foreign to Soviet art were propagated in the State Jewish Theatre under the influence of rootless cosmopolitans,'¹⁹ thundered *Pravda* soon after the murder of Solomon Mikhoels.



Moscow University as realized by Lev Rudnev, after Iofan was fired from the project. Iofan was being attacked for ‘cosmopolitanism’ during Stalin’s post-war campaign of anti-Semitism. Lavrenty Beria, the ruthless leader of the secret police, drafted in thousands of German captives to build the university in just four years.

Those whom the regime punished were all accused of ‘grovelling before Western culture and belittling the importance of national differences in culture and science’. They were charged with failing to give credit for great Russian achievements and with related ‘anti-patriotic activities’.²⁰ Iofan, of course, had been to America and had returned praising the skill of American architects. He had even emphasized the need to adopt American methods of prefabrication with which to make the Soviet building industry more efficient. Once he had been denounced by name, his career never really recovered from the blow. New work evaporated.

As is often the way, the accusers eventually became the accused, and in due course Alabyan too was subjected to one of *Pravda*’s attacks on architects supposedly in thrall to America. One of his crimes appears to have been bringing an exhibition on prefabricated American housing techniques to Moscow.

More importantly, he had a row with Beria about the wisdom of investing so much in the high-rise programme. He was subsequently removed from the leadership of the academy.

During the five-year period from 1948, when he lost the Moscow University job, to 1953, when Stalin died, Iofan had no significant new commissions. He kept working on the projects he already had in the studio. The most promising of these was a new building for the Moscow Oil Institute (now the Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas), commissioned in 1948. This institution did not have the same reputation for anti-Semitism as many other universities in Moscow, which may help to explain why Iofan retained the commission – even so, work did not start on building it until after the death of Stalin.

Iofan and other architects in his team had some protection from Aleksandr Pekarev, secretary of the party cell in Iofan's studio, who pushed back against efforts to have them purged. Pekarev had worked on the House on the Embankment as a labourer. He impressed Iofan, who encouraged him to study architecture. After distinguished war service, Pekarev rejoined Iofan to work on the University. He left the studio to reinvent himself as a sculptor rather than denounce colleagues he believed to be innocent.

Iofan was eventually hungry enough to beg Stalin for work. In May of 1949, by which time he was left with just six draftsmen engaged in desultory work on the Palace of the Soviets, he wrote a letter addressed to 'Dear Iosif Vissarionovich' appealing for more to do. Once the teams building the seven skyscrapers in Moscow were completed, there would be surplus capacity and expertise at his studio. 'Why not authorize me to get the working drawings for the Palace of Soviets completed in the meantime, so that they could be ready for a seamless switch in 1951 when the other towers are ready, and there could be a speedy transition to the Palace of Soviets?'²¹

If Stalin would only consent, then Iofan's team would gladly supply the government with new sketches and new models to show how a scaled-down palace would look. Iofan humiliated himself. 'If it's premature to see our project now, I very much ask for your instructions on assigning me, along with continuing to work on the Palace of Soviets, to any other architectural and construction work. I have a great desire to participate in ongoing construction.' He offered his services to mass industrial housing – 'I have some ideas and preliminary sketches' – and concluded with a direct appeal: 'I am writing to you, Iosif Vissarionovich, believing that my expertise can be useful for the great reconstruction of our country.'²² There was no reply.

Iofan remained a target of the campaign against cosmopolitanism. In 1950, he was subjected to a press campaign that accused him of corruptly favouring a member of his drawing office staff, who it was claimed had abused her position.

Though Iofan had lost Stalin's patronage, he was still too closely associated with the old regime to be considered for new high-profile commissions after Khrushchev came to power and Beria was executed. Khrushchev attacked Stalin's architectural tastes as well as his policies and his personality cult. He insisted that Soviet architecture should abandon the classical language associated with Stalin, and so also with Iofan. Khrushchev wanted a clear break with the past, and in this context Iofan's former privileged place at the heart of Soviet power was a significant handicap.

His position had not been improved by his performance at a conference in the summer of 1950 on the future of the Soviet Union's collective farms. Khrushchev was there to proudly present the results of his building campaign in Ukraine, which had set out to give the farm workers individual modern houses. Iofan was working on a series of unbuilt designs for social amenities for the collectives. He began by attempting flattery – telling the audience how envious he was of his architect colleagues working for Khrushchev in Kiev, building brick houses for rural workers with indoor bathrooms and running water in the Demidovo area.

Iofan reported that while visiting Demidovo, he had heard 'all kinds of arguments' about whether it was 'convenient or not [for peasants] to live in a two-storey house'. Khrushchev was unimpressed: 'Those were city people thinking for the collective farmers.' In his view, peasants would approach any problem 'rationally'. If they had a guaranteed source of milk, he reasoned, they would readily give up their family cow, dress up and go to the theatre.²³

Khrushchev began his campaign against Stalin's building campaign, which was described as representing 'wasted public funds', in 1954.²⁴ He followed up with a detailed scrutiny of the wasteful, impractical excesses of Stalinist architecture throughout the Soviet Union. Names were named during this process, and prizes and honours later withdrawn. Khrushchev issued a decree promising to eradicate the housing shortage within twelve years. He was determined to move Soviet citizens out of communal apartments and into single-family homes.

The following year, the party Central Committee in its decree against architectural excesses called for a new approach that would be 'inherently simple, austere in form and economical to build'.²⁵ In the Khrushchev era, beauty would come not from 'far-fetched costly ornamentation', but through 'organic connection between architectural form and the function of a building, through good proportions, the correct use of materials and the high quality of its workmanship'.²⁶ Politics and architecture in the Soviet Union continued to be inextricably intertwined.

At the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev made his famous denunciation of Stalin's personality cult in the so-called 'secret speech' and attacked Stalin for failing to deliver the Palace of the Soviets: 'Stalin gave proof of his lack of respect for Lenin's memory. It is not a coincidence that, despite the decision taken over thirty years ago to build a Palace of Soviets as a monument to Vladimir Ilyich, this palace was not built, its construction was always postponed and the project allowed to lapse.'²⁷ Iofan saw an opening: he wrote to the leader, pleading for a chance to complete what he had started. Khrushchev reopened the possibility of building a version of the palace on Lenin Hills, and a new competition was started – but Iofan was discouraged from entering it, on the basis that his brand of monumental architecture was inappropriate for the modern Soviet Union.

Iofan was among those held responsible for the excesses and perversions of the past. He had suffered from Stalin's hijack of his design for the palace, then from his anti-Semitism; now he suffered from being labelled old-fashioned. His peers and his protégés, such as Yakov Belopolsky, fared better under the new regime, but Iofan was reduced to drawing his salary, entering competitions and being wheeled out from time to time to provide interventions in the public debate about Moscow's future.

In the twenty-eight years between his traumatic sacking from the Moscow University project and his death in 1976, Iofan realized only three large-scale projects: the Oil and Gas Institute; a housing scheme consisting of four residential towers; and Moscow's Institute of Physical Education. The pressure he was under at this time in his life was reflected in the long gestation period of the Oil and Gas Institute. Not completed until twenty years after it was first commissioned, Iofan's original scheme took the form of a stone-faced baroque palace with a central block of twelve arched bays, topped by a carved escutcheon and framed by two projecting wings. At ground level, a three-storey colonnade running the entire width of the central block would have connected it with two square pavilions. By the time it was actually built, however, such a defiantly classical expression was unthinkable. Iofan did what he could to adjust to the dramatic shift in attitudes that had taken place over the years: the plan and the symmetry remained the same, but the colonnade, arches, pediment and escutcheon were all dispensed with. All that remains of the classical order is a wall system defined by square columns lining the façade and a projecting pavilion at the entrance.

The Khrushchev period was a difficult time for Iofan personally. There was the psychological trauma of the final end of the Palace of the Soviets dream, in which he had invested so much energy. There was the sense that he had been overtaken by a younger generation with more to offer. And in 1961 there was the loss of his wife Olga, his companion and partner for forty-three years. He had relied on her for emotional support and advice. Before her death she asked her daughter to look after him, which the younger Olga did, sharing the apartment in the House on the Embankment.

Olga was buried in Moscow's Novodevichy Cemetery. Iofan's words at her funeral perhaps did not do full justice to the role she undoubtedly played in the studio or in the ongoing evolution of his views on art and architecture: 'There are certain people who are not directly involved in creative work; they may not build houses that they have designed themselves. They may not make scientific discoveries; but they do have a wonderful talent for building the lives of others and creating the circumstances for great

creative work. Olga Fabritsievna had such a talent...'²⁸ Iofan's last two major commissions came after Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin removed Khrushchev from power in 1964. Khrushchev had been determined to overcome the Soviet housing crisis by using industrialized building methods to mass-produce blocks of flats. He had imported the heavy panel concrete building system patented by Raymond Camus in France in 1948, and adapted it to the Moscow climate. Every Soviet architect who wanted to build had to use it, even the Palladian Ivan Zholtovsky. Iofan was no exception, and built three housing schemes around Moscow. The first two were relatively modest five-storey walk-ups with no lifts. In the 1970s, however, he built a complex of four sixteen-storey slabs on Shcherbakovskaya Street, in the new suburb of Izmailovo.

Other than his work on the Moscow University project before Lev Rudnev took over, this complex was the closest Iofan ever came to completing a high-rise. It was urbanism of a kind very different to his earlier designs. The buildings were constructed using a travelling tower crane that could hoist pre-cast concrete slabs, as wide as an apartment, and lower them into position as if stacking up a huge house of cards. They stand in parallel, side-on to the street, connected by low pavilions open to the pavement that accommodate shops and cafés. There was little scope for aesthetic expression, but Iofan gave the narrow ends facing the street brick skins and hollowed-out balconies to lend them some character. The main façades have the proportions of the pre-cast concrete slabs used to build them, but care was taken over the placement of the windows and their relationship with the dimensions of the floor-to-ceiling slabs.



After proposing a design for the unbuilt Ministry of Heavy Industry in 1935–36 on the Zaradye, a prominent site on the riverfront next to Red Square, Iofan returned to the same site at the end of the 1940s with this unsuccessful project for an office tower.



The buildings Iofan did realize in the 1960s, such as the Shcherbakovskaya Street blocks of flats in Moscow, were stripped of decoration and classicism.

Iofan would have one last academic project: a commission that came to him via the Mosproyekt studio, the studio concerned with architecture and planning in the capital, to which he had transferred after the Palace of Soviets project was finally abandoned. The Rector of the State Central Institute of Physical Education approached him with a brief for a complex of sports facilities, classrooms and administrative buildings that would reflect the Soviet Union's determination to become a world leader in competitive sport of all kinds.

Iofan drew up a masterplan for this sports complex on an extensive site on the northern side of Izmailovsky Park that was quite different in conception from his previous work. Rather than subordinating individual components and functions to a single overall visual image, the Institute is made up of a mostly low-rise complex of interconnected elements extending for almost one-third of a mile – a dimension longer than the height of the Palace of Soviets, leading one contemporary critic to describe it as a horizontal skyscraper. With its spread-out campus of connecting low-rise buildings, mostly designed by Iofan, punctuated by the roofs of clear-span sports halls that had to be supported without columns, it reflects the unemphatic architectural consensus of its time.

The ageing Iofan, by this time a frail-looking widower, was photographed in his beret and mackintosh on a site visit when construction started in 1964. He died before the full completion of the campus but he produced schemes for decorating the interiors, especially the long corridors connecting the teaching and office spaces of the campus to the athletics and sports buildings. He was still capable of brave gestures in his designs, and wanted to include a piece of representational sculpture that reflected the ambition of the project. He produced a sketch, just as he had done for the worker and the farm girl for the Paris pavilion, of a couple of giant athletes on a plinth carrying burning torches as in a relay race,

rather than a hammer and sickle. His drawing has the male figure somewhat awkwardly equipped with running shorts. Unfortunately, there was no budget available to pay for a costly piece of large-scale sculpture, so instead Iofan commissioned the artist Klavdiya Tutevol to create a huge, flat mosaic artwork. It fills an entire wall overlooking one of the courtyards around which the campus is planned. Tutevol had been a favoured student of the artist Aleksandr Deineka, who had worked with Iofan decades earlier on the giant paintings made for the interiors of the Paris pavilion. No doubt with Iofan's input, she created a two-dimensional representation of three athletes (two male, one female) – a reminder of Iofan's fascination with the human figure throughout his career and his continuing determination to combine art with architecture.

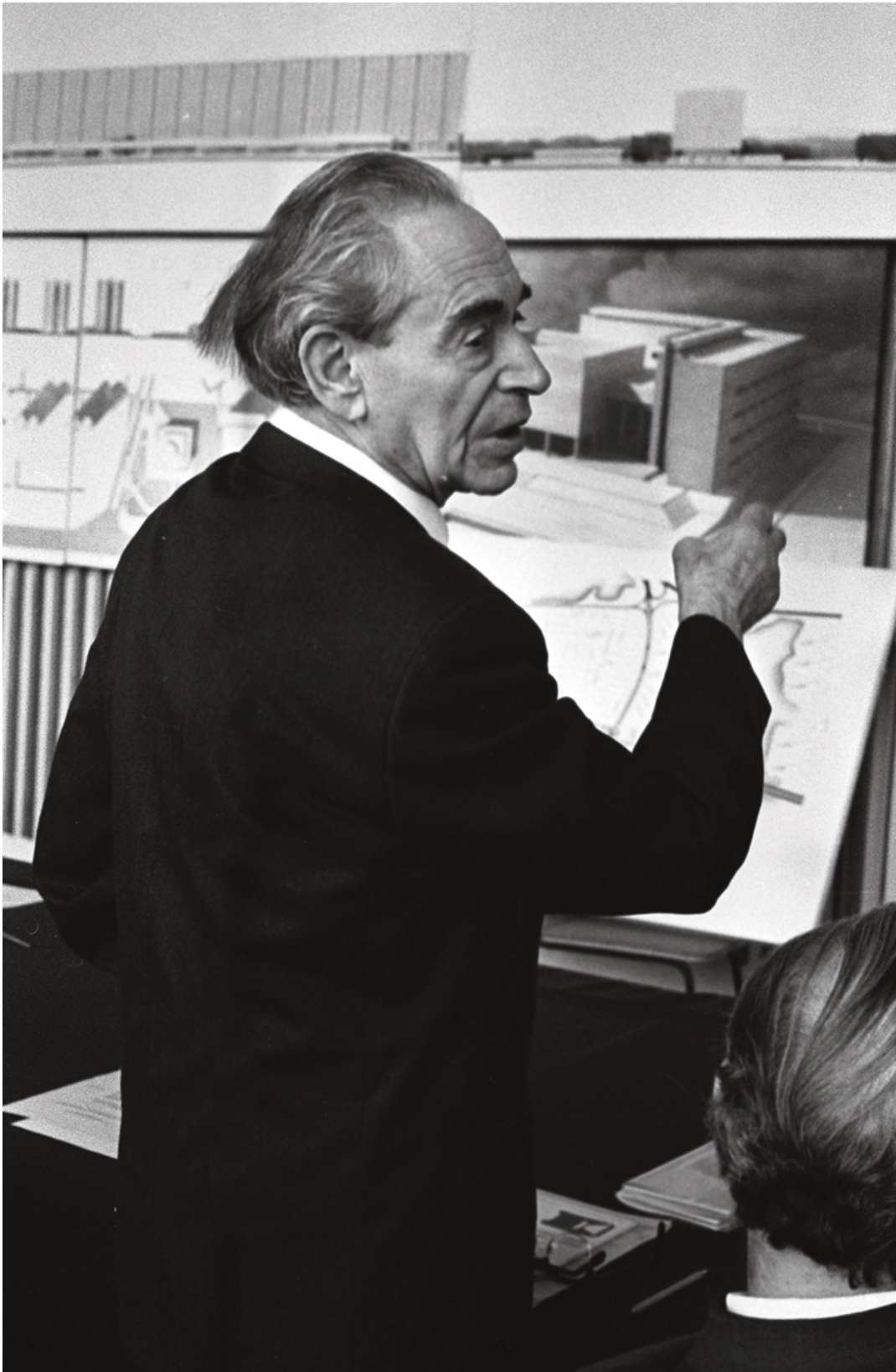
Other than these late projects, during his final years Iofan put most of his energy into making increasingly forlorn submissions for competitions that he never won. Such projects as his scheme for Moscow's bid to host the 1966 World's Fair show that he was making an attempt to find a new and contemporary language of glass and simplified geometry.

Looking at the totality of his work suggests that there was no reason why Iofan could not have followed a path similar to that of his American contemporary Wallace Harrison, in order to remain relevant into the 1960s. They had both been educated in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts tradition; Harrison, four years younger than Iofan, had actually studied at the Ecole in Paris while Iofan was in Rome. Harrison had moved from the art deco detail and classical planning of Rockefeller Center to the modern baroque of Lincoln Center by way of his role as executive architect for the United Nations building in New York. Like Iofan, he had developed an important relationship with a powerful political figure: as Nelson Rockefeller's architect for thirty years, he was responsible for everything from Rockefeller's New York apartment with its Fernand Léger mural to the Empire State Plaza in Albany – Rockefeller's attempt to bring a touch of Brasília to the Hudson Valley in the shape of the New York State government complex.

Iofan, who worked for almost twenty-five years for Joseph Stalin, had an equally wide range. The Barvikha sanatorium and the design for the agricultural university were not his only rationalist projects: there was also a dacha in the form of a modernist villa. But the opportunity to remain relevant was denied to Iofan in the USSR. The second half of his career is a cautionary tale of how damaging it can be to come close to political power, especially for an architect negotiating an accommodation with tyranny. It was not only George Orwell's prose writer who was forced to choose between silence and death.

Epilogue

Boris Mikhailovich Iofan faced the end of his life as he had, for the most part, lived it: in a room of his own making. It was simply furnished but generously proportioned, with a view from bay windows over extensive lawns and gardens, and it was spacious enough to accommodate his drawing board. Here in the hospital ward of Barvikha, the sanatorium he had built almost half a century earlier, he had either designed or chosen everything – the curtains, the brass light fittings, the desks and armchairs made of solid bog oak.



Iofan, who continued working until his death in 1976, lived long enough to look beyond the monumental classicism of his work for Stalin.

Almost until the moment of his death, Iofan kept up the torrent of drawings with which he had measured out every episode in his long working life, from his days as a student in Rome to his travels

around America and his work in Stalingrad. He was trying to resolve something that had troubled him ever since the return to Moscow, almost forty years earlier, of the stainless steel figures that had crowned his Soviet pavilion in Paris. What could he do to ensure they were treated properly?

At the Exposition of 1937, the factory worker and the girl from the collective farm had stood almost 80 feet tall on top of Iofan's 160-foot pavilion, symbolizing the march of the millions liberated by the revolution towards a glorious future. They had subsequently been returned to Moscow as twenty-four wagonloads of broken fragments. Neither Iofan nor Vera Mukhina had been allowed to go to Paris to supervise the process of dismantling them, and without their expertise the figures had been crudely sawn up into fragile pieces.

The physical damage was considerable, but manageable. Iofan and Mukhina had been more disappointed by the way the figures were treated after being restored. In Paris they had been an integral part of a major piece of architecture, occupying a key position. Back in Moscow, they were installed on a leftover patch of land at the entrance to the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, a curious mix of exhibition complex, theme park and amusement centre. The figures had been conceived as roughly half the height of the Paris pavilion, but when they were re-erected in 1939 they were twice the height of their new base, a perfunctory 30-foot block of granite. The effect was comically awkward, calling to mind a pair of performing seals dancing on a barrel.

It was heartbreaking for Iofan and Mukhina to see all the work they had done, the scale models and sketches they had produced while seeking the perfect balance between sculpture and architecture, negated in this way. The worker and farm girl had been designed for crowds in Paris to admire from far below, with the sky as their background, and now they were lost in a disconnected jumble of pavilions dedicated to rabbit breeding and animal husbandry.

Iofan and Mukhina lobbied for a better setting, one that would make sense of the most famous project either of them had ever completed – a fitting tribute to their moment of triumph over Germany, Hitler, Speer and the sculptor Josef Thorak. Iofan drew up a string of proposals to make their case. At the very least, they asked for a substantial increase in the height of the plinth to recreate the view of the sculpture from the ground. But what Iofan really wanted was to reconstruct the entire pavilion, ideally on a site that reflected the significant contribution it had made to the national identity of the Soviet Union.



(Above and below) When Iofan's pavilion in Paris was demolished, Mukhina's sculpture was re-erected at Moscow's agricultural exhibition site (above). Its base was absurdly out of scale with the two figures and Iofan and Mukhina both spent the rest of their lives lobbying for a better solution. Eventually rust forced comprehensive repairs (below).



For a time, he hoped to include it in his design for the new Moscow University. When he was sacked from that project, Mukhina wrote a personal letter to Lavrenty Beria (addressed warmly to ‘Dear Lavrenty Pavlovich’) asking him to find a place for the sculpture on the new university campus on Lenin Hills; but nothing came of this. After Mukhina’s death in 1953, Iofan carried on the struggle alone.

He tried to keep the statue in the public eye. The Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman made regular cameo appearances in the competition entries Iofan submitted during the 1950s and 1960s, invariably unsuccessfully. When he worked on a proposal for the All Russia Exhibition Centre in 1955, he incorporated them on a new plinth. The scheme on which he was working at the time of his death was both speculative and autobiographical. He described it as an art museum, and he located it on a generic site by the Moskva River much like the one he had used for the Palace of the Soviets. It brought together fragments of the key projects of his career. He placed a full-size reconstruction of the Paris pavilion, topped by Mukhina’s sculpture, nearest to the water. Next to it was a massive but relatively low circular structure – a reworking of the very first version of the palace, as it had been before Iofan allowed Stalin to take control of the project. To crown the site, he placed a slender rectangular tower – apparently in tribute to Rockefeller Center – in its top right-hand corner.

Iofan had a drawing of this scheme in his hands when his doctor, making the rounds at Barvikha, found him unconscious in his armchair in the spring of 1976. Six days later, on 11 March, Iofan was dead, having never recovered consciousness. The Soviet Union itself had only another thirteen years left to run.

It would be another three decades before Iofan’s ambition to relocate the worker and the farm girl was realized. Since 2009, they have crowned a new exhibition hall loosely based on Iofan’s pavilion. In execution, the modern pavilion is insultingly crude: its tower, instead of being faced with red stone, is

clad in coloured tiles ranging from reddish to white, calling to mind the pixellation techniques used to conceal the identity of suspected criminals. Its main gallery is cut awkwardly short, upsetting Iofan's careful balance of horizontal and vertical proportions. The windows bear little resemblance to his original design, and the details of the roof trim are particularly clumsy. The pavilion's only redeeming feature is that its tower is tall enough to provide an appropriate platform for Mukhina's sculpture.

This questionable tribute to Iofan was orchestrated by Yuri Luzhkov, Moscow's second post-communist mayor. He had begun his term of office in 1992 with the reconstruction of another long-vanished building, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, wiping out the last traces of the palace Iofan had dedicated so much of his life to building. A firework display marked the opening of Luzhkov's new pavilion in 2009, and shortly afterwards he was finally forced from office after years in which the corruption of his administration had been an open secret. (His wife, Yelena Baturina, often described as Russia's wealthiest woman, had made her fortune in construction – much of it through contracts awarded by his administration, including the one for the new pavilion.)

Many years earlier, of course, Nikita Khrushchev had turned the palace's foundation pit into a swimming pool. For a while this had been an enormously popular attraction, not only during Moscow's hot summers but also in its icy winters, when the heated water produced billowing clouds of steam amongst the banks of snow. The pool outlasted Iofan but, like everything else in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it suffered from poor maintenance. Eventually Luzhkov closed it down and it vanished – just like the unfinished palace, the historic cathedral before it and the monastery that had once stood on the same site – to be replaced by the new Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Ownership of the land had already, in 1990, been returned to the Russian Orthodox Church. Although the patriarchate claimed to have raised the necessary funds for the new building – at least \$250 million – most of that money actually came from the federal government, at Luzhkov's urging. The new cathedral purported to be a precise reconstruction of the one Stalin and Kaganovich had destroyed in 1931. But Luzhkov and his well-connected sculptor friend Zurab Tsereteli, who was also responsible for a monstrous 320-foot monument to Peter the Great installed across the river in 1997, did something rather different. Tsereteli insisted on a bronze relief frieze of figures running around the building, in place of the original marble. It charts Russian history in a jarringly continuous stream of spear-clutching warriors and bearded priests, brandishing the word of God held aloft on metal tablets like digital cameras raised by supplicant tourists. Donations from Luzhkov's unsavoury business partners were used to fund other embellishments; the gold for the domes, for example, came from the now defunct Stolichny Bank.

Today the cathedral is protected by a grey metal fence, ringed by elaborately swagged cast-iron lamp posts, lathe-turned stone balustrades and endlessly bifurcating steps. It sits on a band of slimy, putty-coloured polished granite with a funereal grey rusticated stone base. The simulacrum of the destroyed church conceals a subterranean complex of ramps and underground parking lots. The elaborations of the bronze doors, the sculpture and the inscriptions, the gaudy flower beds, the evocations of 19th-century lamp posts and the carved stone are all the work of 20th-century craftsmen.

The original cathedral had been inaugurated with Tchaikovsky's specially composed *1812 Overture*. Boris Yeltsin lay in state in the new one, and later Pussy Riot were arrested there for protesting at Vladimir Putin's close links with the Orthodox Church. Just as the Bolsheviks in 1918 had set about removing all monuments to the tsars and their servants, so the end of communism saw the toppling in 1989 of a statue of the founder of the Soviet secret police, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, who had been a client of Iofan's.

As an architect Iofan would have been disappointed by Luzhkov's clumsy rebuilding of his pavilion, and as a lifelong communist he would have been baffled by the resurrection of both the pavilion and the cathedral. Luzhkov was attempting to reverse some of the damage inflicted by Stalin, yet at the same time he identified Iofan's architecture with a Soviet Union at the height of its power and he mourned its loss. The images that Stalin had created in art and in architecture retained their power, while selective amnesia ensured that the breathtaking cruelty underpinning the creation of those images was being

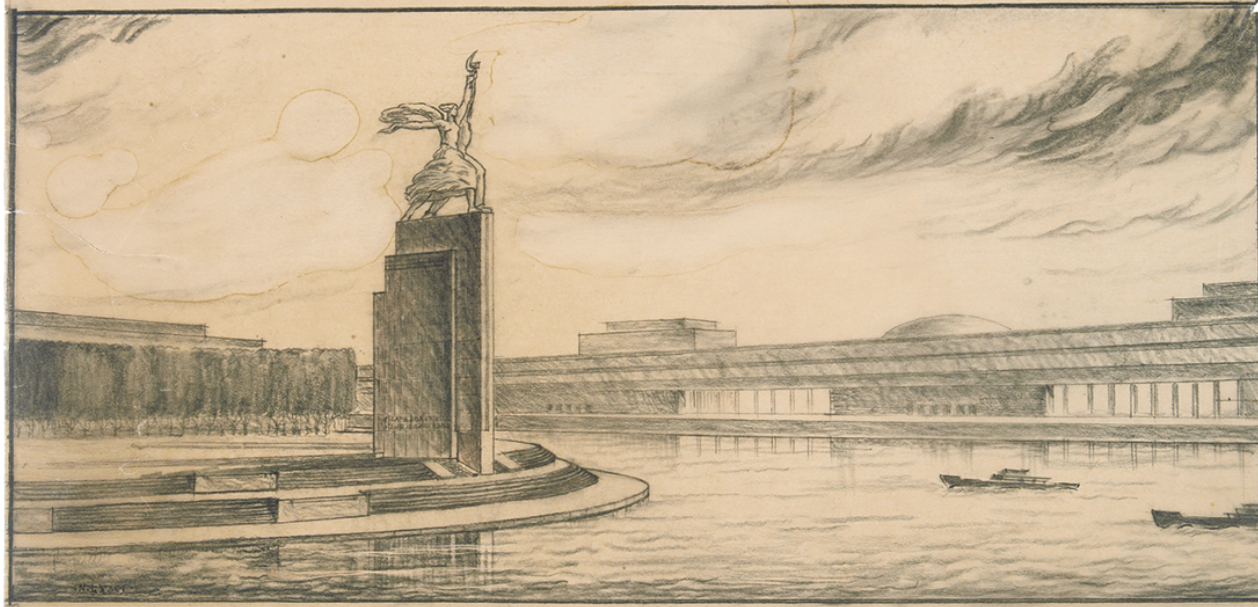
forgotten. Rather than rebuilding both the cathedral and the pavilion, the wonder is that Luzhkov didn't attempt to finish the Palace of the Soviets. As a strategy it would at least have shown some consistency.

The meaning of Iofan's own work cannot be understood in isolation from the regime he once served. There is a stark difference between the House on the Embankment as it is today and the frivolous reconstruction of the Paris pavilion: with its museum and its silent memorials to those who lost their lives under Stalin's regime, the House bears moving witness to the people who once lived there. The pavilion, by contrast, is a travesty of history.

But in their present state, both the House and the garish ghost of the pavilion are evidence that buildings can acquire meanings very different from those intended by their architects. They demonstrate that even for such a politically engaged architect as Boris Iofan, there is a crucial difference between the political and the architectural intentions of a completed work.



Moscow's former mayor Yuri Luzhkov was responsible for the reconstruction of both the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and Iofan's Paris pavilion. The reconstructed pavilion bears only a passing resemblance to what Iofan had built.



Iofan kept working on ways to give Mukhina's re-erected sculpture an appropriate base until almost his last moment, as in this sketch from the 1970s.

Notes

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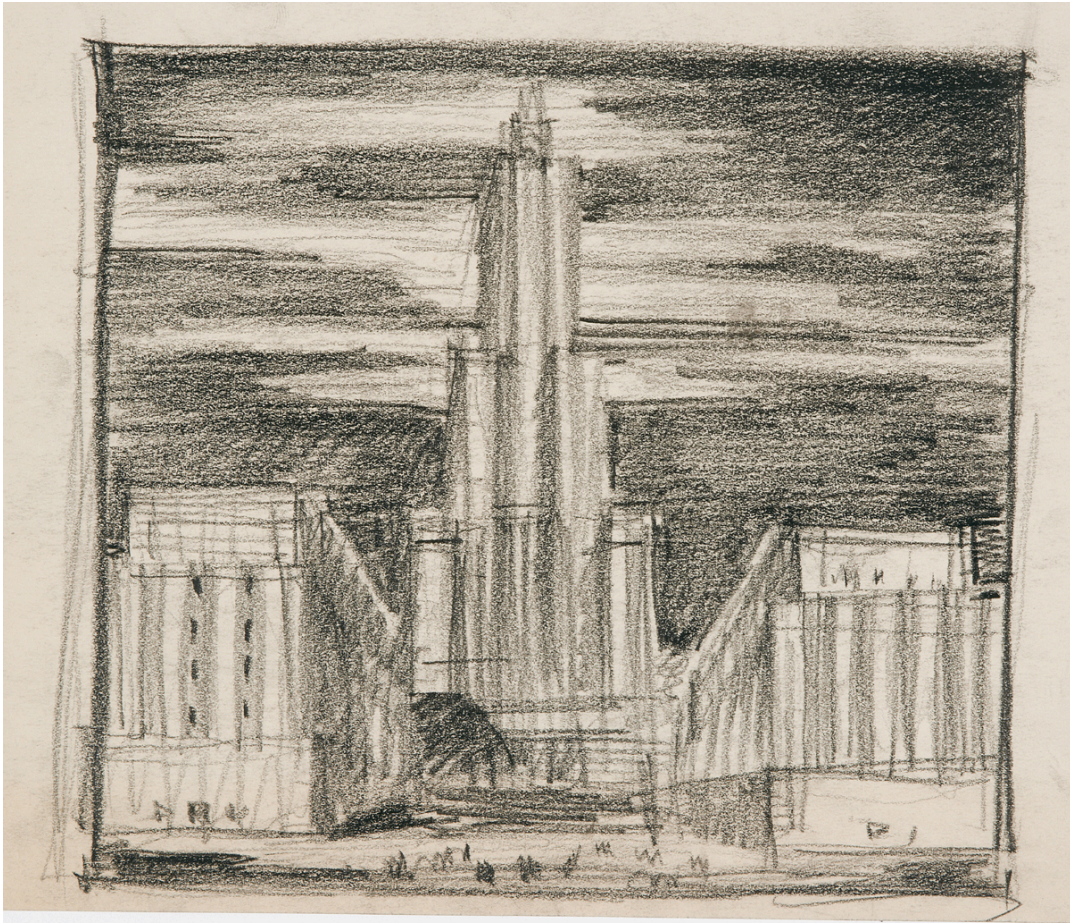
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